

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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- * Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of January 20, 1941.
 † "Lady Who Came to Stay" opened Thursday, January 2nd, at the Maxine Elliott Theatre.
 † "First Stop to Heaven" opened Sunday, January 5th, at the Windsor Theatre.
 † "Eight O'Clock Tuesday" opened Monday, January 6th, at the Henry Miller Theatre.
 † "Night of Love" opened Tuesday, January 7th, at the Hudson Theatre.
 † "Arsenic and Old Lace" opened Friday, January 10th, at the Fulton Theatre.
 † "Mr. and Mrs. North" opened Sunday, January 12th, at the Belasco Theatre.
 † "Crazy With the Heat" opened Tuesday, January 14th, at the 44th St. Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"Crazy With the Heat"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 15, 1941

'Crazy With the Heat,' Competent Revue, Opens at Forty-fourth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening's "Crazy With the Heat" is one of those rather frequently occurring revues which are smooth and iridescent on the surface as soap bubbles, but unfortunately also resemble soap bubbles in being hollow within. A pretty surface is a lot, of course. Suavely blended colors please the eye, expert dancing is delightful to watch and general professional competence is comforting.

"Crazy With the Heat," which opened at the Forty-fourth Street Theater, has all these things. Albert Johnson's sets and the costumes of Lester Polakov and Maria Humans are freshly attractive. Catherine Littlefield has put her boys and girls smoothly through the intricacies of ingenious, if not acutely original, dances. Irving Graham has written pleasant music and conventionally light hearted lyrics and Gracie Barrie, Marie Nash and others sing them with alert professionalism. You will, I think, find few minor faults in "Crazy With the Heat." All the bearings are greased; all the

cogs mesh. But expertness, gratifying as it always is, wears a little thin through an evening.

When song and dance begin to pall is, of course, when comedy should come bustling in. Kurt Kasznar, who produced "Crazy With the Heat," has gone a couple of brisk steps in the right direction. He has engaged Willie Howard, who is one of the funniest of mortals, and Miss Luella Gear, whose drollery is always captivating. And, sure enough, both Mr. Howard and Miss Gear are pretty funny on occasion.

Mr. Howard, for example, is funny as anything toward the close of the show when he appears as a cafe singer who "goes with the dinner" and drives the customers indignantly mad. He is funny for a while as a butcher boy who meets a mad woman and after a time goes mad himself. But not even Mr. Howard can be as funny as he ought to be for as long a time as this sketch requires. After a while Mr. Howard simmers down, and this is always a trying spectacle. He simmers down again, through no fault of his own, in an impersonation of a ballet dancer. He is left dangling a long time after the fun has gone out of a parody of "Life With Father." And Miss Gear, although once she smokes three cigars simultaneously and is much on the stage, has even less to work with.

The plaint of bad material is an old one and must, I suppose, be growing a little monotonous. But bad material is monotonous, too. It is aggravating to see such comica as Mr. Howard and Miss Gear wasted. What "Crazy With the Heat" needs is a little wit. There ought to be some around somewhere.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 15, 1941

'Crazy With the Heat'—Or Something —Misses Competing Standards

"Crazy With the Heat," musical revue, assembled and produced by Kurt Kasznar. Presented at the 44th St. Theatre, New York, Jan. 14, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

WILLIE HOWARD and Luella Gear have a tough time of it trying to lift "Crazy With the Heat" to the level of the current competition in Broadway musical entertainment. They have the will, and the talent, but they lack the material to work with.

Mr. Howard is more fortunate, I think, than Miss Gear. He has a sketch or two that draw even with previous efforts of his in the laugh-getting line. But she, poor girl, has practically nothing save a brazenly coarse ditty about her penchant for adventuring on a yacht.

So much is true, too, of others in the assembled cast. Mostly they are performers of talent and experience, but what they contribute is either smothered in production or lacking in taste.

For example, Ted Gary and Betty Kean are exceptional acrobatic dancers reduced to an imitation wire walking act that cost a lot to stage and falls as flat as a soprano's sour note.

Luba Rostova, who, being one of the more promising and attractive "baby ballerinas" taken into the Ballet Russe and the Ballet de Monte Carlo, has been lured into this lower form of entertainment and given nothing to do worthy either her skill or her promise.

Carl Randall, long one of the more agile and inventive of American dancers, comes back after a considerable absence, is pushed about in two or three second rate numbers, with

only his old solo specialty to indicate his ability.

Don Cumming, who may conceivably be a riot after midnight in any night club, is badly set in "Crazy With the Heat." Richard Kollmar, a dependable singer, and Marie Nash, an ambitious prima donna, have nothing worth while to sing.

Gracie Barrie, attractive in her own right as a singing comedienne, has only her pertness and her energy to substitute for a lack of song and dance material.

So while young Kurt Kasznar, the producer, and a newcomer, indicates a willingness to spend his own or somebody's money generously, and has given Albert Johnson the commission for the settings, which are at least bizarre, and Catherine Littlefield the job of staging the dancing, which is entirely routine, the whole adventure seems, at current tariffs, something of a mistake.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 15, 1941

Better Hurry To See This One

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I SHAN'T take up much of your time this morning.

The various offerings in last night's revue can be divided into four classes: indiscretions, misadventures, penitentiary offenses, and hanging matters.

You could spend half your life trying to find a kindly adjective to describe "Crazy With the Heat," and the very best you could wind up with is "lavish." Its sketches are the sort that give a distinct impression of being trilogies. Its songs are the sort that when they're reprised you can't ever remember having heard them before. In fact, it's one of those shows that try to get laughs by using what seem to be dirty words but aren't.

In such surroundings two such dependable comica as Willie Howard and Luella Gear seemed to be working from inside cakes of ice. There was nothing they could do. Now and then came a funny line sticking up like a lone piece of seaweed in the boundless ocean. People danced, too—on both legs; and choruses put on elegant clothes, and there were some pretty scenic effects. There was even a cultural dividend—a spectacle "inspired by Toulouse-Lautrec." He painted, says a program note.

But! And I don't mean that it's cold out.

"Crazy With the Heat"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 15, 1941

'Crazy With the Heat' At 44th Street Theatre

Willie Howard, Luella Gear, Richard Kollmar Return to Broadway in Musical Production

By JOHN ANDERSON

THE chief difference between "Crazy With the Heat" and one of the dullest evenings you can imagine is that "Crazy With the Heat" was presented last night on the stage of the 44th St. Theatre, and you can keep your imaginings to yourself please. There are plenty of credits in the playbill, but very few on the stage, and while the show brings such welcome people as Willie Howard, Luella Gear, and Richard Kollmar to town, it would have been easier on everybody if they had just phoned and said they were back.

In the case of Mr. Howard, of course, this is an offense against the happiness of the Republic, since he is one of our best funny men and he deserves first-rate stuff for his foolishness. Instead, he has a laborious parody of "Life With Father" and two bouts with the radio, one as the Voice of Experience, which uses double-talk in the only genuinely funny sketch of the evening, and the other as the winner of a Pot of Gold—a man who had the forethought to move to East Orange and install 34 phones in his house.

It muffed an original and hilarious idea with the sort of insistent heaviness that begets the show at every twist of a gag or every turn of a leg.

The old master also came on as a very conversational ballet dancer whose droopy drawers appearance was much funnier than anything the author could make him say or do.

When the great Willie is not around trying valiantly to coax a laugh out of the customers, the stage is turned over to the always suave and unflustered Miss Gear, or to the vocal chords of the likeable Mr. Kollmar. As a French sailor, loiling beside one of the Normandie's North River bollards, Mr. Kollmar raises an uninteresting lament for the gaiety that was Paris, and yearns so audibly for those departed charms that we see them in

'CRAZY WITH THE HEAT'

A revue in two acts; lyrics and music by Irvin Graham; additional music by Rudi Blevil; choreography by Catherine Littlefield; settings and lighting by Albert Johnson; costumes by Lester Polakov and Maria Humans; sketches staged by Arthur Sheekman; sketches by Sam E. Morris, H. I. Phillips, Mack Davis, Robert Marko, Don Herold, Mr. Sheekman and Max Liebman; production staged and presented at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre on January 14, 1941, by Kurt Kaszner. In the cast are Willie Howard, Luella Gear, Gracie Barrie, Richard Kollmar, Luba Rostova, Carl Randall, Marie Nash, Betty Kean, Don Cumming and others.

his vision, which suggests, alas! that they were as routine as "Crazy With the Heat."

4 Dance Numbers

Miss Gear has a "Yacht Song" that is too obvious for her slyest insinuation, and she manages pleasantly the difficult job of telling the audience how to come back to the show on time after the intermission, advice which, unhappily, seemed useless to a good many who weren't coming back at all.

The four full-stage dance numbers were as uninspired as the rest and seemed pretty cluttered, not only in ideas but in the usually impeccable Mr. Johnson's costumes and scenery. "Wine From My Slipper, an elaborate item "inspired," as the playbill says, by Toulouse-Lautrec, shouldn't be blamed on that fastidious gentleman, and the first act finale with the title song had nothing but a sort of mechanical exuberance to recommend its weary bounce.

It is, naturally, depressing to see so much money, time, effort and talent wasted on such humdrum and tasteless material.

What the producers thought was "Crazy With the Heat" never thawed into human entertainment.

It's where I caught this cold shoulder.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 15, 1941

Sketches in Crazy With the Heat Reach High Spot in Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

KURT KASZNER'S new revue, *Crazy With the Heat*, possesses speed and noise, but during a greater part of its two dozen numbers the talents of such fine performers as Willie Howard and Luella Gear are thrown away in sketches that look and sound like the flotsam and jetsam of some producer's waste basket.

There are times, to be sure, when Mr. Howard and Miss Gear rise far above their shoddy material. Mr. Howard as a spindle-shanked ballet master, with Miss Gear as an obliging interpreter for his voluble Russian, is something to remember. So are his activities as a Muscovite mandolin player annoying the patrons of a

restaurant. But these relieving notes of comedy are the personal property of Mr. Howard and Miss Gear. They bear no relation to the work of Mr. Kaszner's stable of authors.

I cannot imagine any thing less droll, for example, than Robert Marko's inept attempt to produce a burlesque of *Life with Father* out of material that would have been hooted off the stage at the Old Howard in Boston as long ago as 1910.

Richard Kollmar, another featured player, is to my mind one of the most attractive of our singing juveniles, and Gracie Barrie is pert, pretty and graceful as his partner, but here again there is a shocking waste of talent on mediocre songs and ineffective dances.

Under these circumstances, and in a frantic endeavor to grasp at some comforting

thought about the whole misadventure, I turn to a Miss Betty Kean who has come out of nowhere, or perhaps Hollywood, and who steals the show—an easy matter considering how light it is—with her dance burlesques and her good-natured rowdy-dow. Miss Kean is a youngster with natural rather than studied or acquired wit.

A fantasy called *Some Day*, in which a scene at the pier where the *Normandie* is tied up dissolves into a Paris street scene, is reasonably well done.

Willie Howard and Harold Gary reached a high in entertainment in Arthur Sheekman's parody of a goodwill hour on the radio, in which Mr. Howard gave some extraordinary advice in reply to Mr. Gary's doubletalk. Miss Gear struggled, almost successfully, to put the audience in a merry mood by her counsel on the subject of behavior in the lobby between acts. Don Cumming contributed another pleasant moment with some lariat looping and Ted Gary danced amusingly. But these were merely way stations on the tedious journey.

Irvin Graham's music was brassy, in the modern manner. Whether the lyrics were good or bad deponent cannot say, since they were unintelligible as far front as E-2. Catherine Littlefield was responsible for the choreography, the chief feature of which was the frequent hoisting of muscular dames, by leg and thigh, over the heads of their fellow ballerinas, and the attempts of the elevated females to maintain their precarious perches without too much awkward thrashing about.

Crazy With the Heat will create no active competition for the current musical successes.

"Crazy With the Heat"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 15, 1941

Willie Howard and Luella Gear Are Starred in a Revue Entitled 'Crazy With the Heat'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVER since last Summer "Crazy With the Heat" has been crazy with the heat somewhere or other. During the coldest spell of the Winter it turned up, chapped a little in important places, at the Forty-fourth Street last evening. Among other things, it demonstrates the advisability of staging musical shows with taste and originality. For Willie Howard, the round-shouldered mountebank, has propped up shows no better than this one. "Crazy With the Heat" also includes Luella Gear smoking three cigars simultaneously, and a dead-pan dancing comic known as Betty (Goofy) Kean, who is funny. But most of the material in the revue is half-hearted, the music is no particular delight and the general impression is of energy wasted in a routine cause.

Even when the stars are jangled, Willie

Howard generally comes to the surface with something good between thumb and finger. For the most part, he is appearing in sketches

with pointless dialogue and flat endings. That is a pity. Willie's startled face is always a promise of merriment, and his enthusiasm for foreign tongues with grotesque vowel sounds is always convulsing. Once he appears as a ballet-master, his bony legs encased in wrinkled tights and his sharp fingers clutching a rose. But the conclusion to the ballet sketch is as flat as the rest, and Willie's chief contribution to the evening is his cry of agony in another sketch when he discovers that he has killed a relative. "What have I done," he bellows, "murdered my own fish and blood!"

Goofy Kean is the other bright spot in an undistinguished program. A plain girl, with perhaps a leaning toward adenoids, she can dance like a whisp and interpolate wry burlesques of show conventions as she rushes along. Carl Randall, who has not been around in person for some time, introduces a skiffid dance skit in his usual good taste. In addition to smoking all those cigars, Miss Gear sings a song or two and serves as M. C. feminine gender. Ted Gary dances with rangy good humor. Richard Kollmar, Gracie Barrie and Marie Nash sing what is set before them. In an elaborate Toulouse-Lautrec period piece, Luba Rostova dances something that eludes this reviewer's comprehension.

But that may not be her fault. For it is hard to pay strict attention to a revue that lacks style, ideas and showmanship.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 15, 1941

Mr. Howard and Miss Gear In "Crazy With the Heat"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH the accordion-faced Willie Howard can be one of the theatre's drollest clowns, and Luella Gear is a breezy lady who can make much of very little, both of them are human enough to be unable to turn nothing into something. And turning nothing into something is the major assignment they are jointly asked to meet in "Crazy With the Heat."

There may be those who, in their desperate search to find something worse than last night's arrival at the Forty-fourth Street, will insist it is better than was "All in Fun," that recent musical in which even the great Bill Robinson got lost. The demerits of either case seem scarcely worth arguing, since in both instances the merits are so impossible to defend.

In the interests of sweet charity, let it be

briefly noted that Mr. Howard and Miss Gear try valiantly to act as if they had materials at their disposal. Miss Gear does not even

seem to mind such a number as "Yacht Song." She sings it just as if she thought it were funny. Then there are faint glimmers of the true Willie Howard in "The Pot of Gold" parody (which starts off well) and in his antics as a great ballet dancer and as a vocalist in a Russian restaurant. But these glimmers prove to be no more than matches lighted during a total black-out.

A Bad Evening

Gracie Barrie, to be sure, manages to rise above a swift succession of dull songs to suggest how crisp and effective she could be both as a dancer and a singer. Betty Kean likewise indicates the genuine humor which might be hers. And Richard Kollmar sings nicely some songs he might just as well not have bothered to sing.

But for the most part "Crazy With the Heat" does little more than stretch minutes into hours. It comes as a grab bag of wheezes, weak and old. Even its supposedly spectacular moments, such as the Toulouse-Lautrec number called "Wine From My Slipper" or the interlude in the zoo known as "Sacha's Got a Girl," show none of Albert Johnson's usual flair for design and are notable mainly for their dullness.

The blunt truth is that "Crazy With the Heat" is neither hot nor crazy. It is more coldly pathetic than any revue assembled in the interests of diversion has either the right or excuse to be.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 15, 1941

Poor Willie Howard!

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF "Crazy With the Heat" is remembered in theatrical annals, it will be as the one expensive musical show produced in New York in the season of 1940-'41 that was worse than the collapsible "All in Fun." A dull and foolish revue that succeeds in being old-fashioned without capturing the slightest quality of nostalgia, the new revue is guilty of many terrible things, but the most unforgivable of all is that it wastes the talents of that fine comedian, Willie Howard. Mr. Howard emerges from time to time in various skits and he always manages to be funny, but his sketches are so fatuous that it is a lost cause for which he battles.

Several estimable people, in addition to Mr. Howard, are unhappily immersed in these dire proceedings. There are, for example, Richard

Kollmar, one of the best of the musical comedy juveniles, who here has to carry a dismal

burden of song and comedy, and Miss Gracie Barrie, who is an attractive and likable young singer, and Carl Randall, who was an expert dancer in the days of Ziegfeld. Then, too, there is Miss Luella Gear, and, although she has been extremely good in many previous musical shows, she doesn't seem a great deal more effective than her material in "Crazy With the Heat." All of these players and their unsung colleagues I salute for courage if not for judgment.

Looking desperately about for something friendly to say of this new revue, I think I can clutch at one song called "Twist of the Wrist" and herald it as being pretty good. As for the sketches, they are almost heroically bad, even though the names of such expert humorous writers as Arthur Sheekman, H. I. Phillips and Don Herold are attached to a few of them. In justice to these gentlemen, however, I should add at once that the worst sketch of all, a little thing presumably offering a parody on "Life With Father"—at least it is called "Life Without Father"—and the main character wears a red wig—is the work of someone else. Somehow I don't think you'd care much for "Crazy With the Heat."

"Mr. and Mrs. North"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 13, 1941

'Mr. and Mrs. North' Meet Murder in Owen Davis Comedy at the Belasco

RICHARD LOCKRIDGE will have to be marked "absent" from his accustomed corner today, but we hasten to add that it is in a good cause. For "Mr. and Mrs. North," those delightful Greenwich Villagers whom he invented, and he and Mrs. Lockridge got involved in a murder mystery a while back, were most happily transferred to the stage of the Belasco Theater last evening by Owen Davis in an entertaining and breezy play.

It is the style these days to sprinkle a full measure of laughs along the way as the police try to find out who did the killing, and the thoroughly charming and thoroughly scatter-brained Mrs. North is decidedly just the person to keep a murder mystery light-hearted. As a result, there were chuckles aplenty at the Belasco last night, to say nothing of a couple of good lusty feminine screams, too on the audience's side of the footlights.

In case you haven't met young Mrs. North and her slightly more serious minded husband through Mr. Lockridge's New Yorker stories and the Lockridges' detective novels, we might explain, however, that Mrs. North, while amusingly flighty, is no fool. And when the somewhat unpleasant husband of one of the Norths' acquaintances is found slain in their Greenwich Place apartment, after they have both been away over night, she pitches right in to help the good-looking young lieutenant of detectives assigned to the case to track down the murderer. Before things are cleared up, quite a few of the Norths' friends are included in the list of suspects, but just how well Mrs. North succeeds in the detective profession you'll have to drop around to the Belasco to find out for yourself. We might add, however, that she has moments

of amazing even Mullins, who is the lieutenant's man Friday. Mullins, incidentally, is laconic and hard-boiled, and a delight. He hates "fancy" cases like the Norths'. Those where you can hustle the suspects right down to the station house are the kind for him.

One of the pleasantest features of this detective yarn of the Lockridges, when it was between covers, was that it was not only a neat and expertly wrapped mystery package but the Norths kept it from being routine. And Mr. Davis has transferred this couple of the Lockridges' behind the footlights in admirable style, so that his play has as much appeal as a comedy as it has a mystery. Of course, with Mrs. North around, it is not possible to hold the drama completely taut, but Mr. Davis keeps her from digressing too far from the business at hand.

The choices for the roles of Mr. and Mrs. North are most happy ones. It is hard to imagine a more perfect Mrs. North than that of Peggy Conklin, for she makes that somewhat baffling young woman amusing and

'MR. AND MRS. NORTH'

A comedy by Owen Davis, from the stories by Richard and Frances Lockridge; directed by Alfred de Liagre Jr.; setting by Joe Mielziner; presented at the Belasco Theater on January 12, 1941 by Mr. de Liagre. The cast:

Mr. North	Albert Hackett
Buono	Tito Vuolo
Mrs. North	Peggy Conklin
Claire Brent	Barbara Woodell
Louis Berex	Owen Davis Jr.
Jane Wilson	Joan Marlowe
Ben Wilson	Lex Lindsay
Clinton Edwards	Lewis Martin
Cooper, a Policeman	Wylie Adams
Mrs. Brooks	Catherine Lawrence
Mr. Brooks	Gordon Duff
Lt. Weigand	Philip Ober
Detective Mullins	Millard Mitchell
Jenkins, Ambulance Dr.	Carter Blake
Asst. Medical Examiner	William Barry
Jones, Police Photographer	Don Hagertry
Ross, Fingerprint Man	Harold Grau
Fully Brush Man	Horace Cooper
Inspector O'Malley	Stanley Jessup
Timothy Barnes	Frank Wilcox

likeable and real. And Albert Hackett, returning to Broadway after a considerable absence in Hollywood, is equally excellent as her loving and at times sorely tried husband. Philip Ober keeps the detective lieutenant both personable and expert, and in Mullins, Millard Mitchell has a part perfectly suited to his style of dry humor, and he makes the most of it. One delightful bit is contributed by Horace Cooper as a brush salesman and Lex Lindsay as one of the less pleasant suspects has a brief but highly effective moment in the foreground. In fact the cast as a whole is a good one.

Tomorrow night Mr. Lockridge will return to his seat on the aisle, and he can do so with the comfortable knowledge that last evening his Norths proved themselves distinctly a couple Broadway should welcome. HERRICK BROWN.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 13, 1941

'Mr. and Mrs. North' Staged At the Belasco Theatre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN ADDITION to being an excellent magazine, the New Yorker is rapidly becoming one of the major try-out towns for the local stage. Having already contributed to Broadway the materials upon which such current successes as "My Sister Eileen," "Pal Joey," and "Life With Father" are based, it must be thanked again for last night's arrival at the Belasco.

For the comedy Alfred de Liagre is there presenting under the title of "Mr. and Mrs. North" brings us face to face with that agreeable couple, living in Greenwich Village, to whom Richard Lockridge first introduced us in the pages of the New Yorker. With his wife, Frances, Mr. Lockridge has more recently asked the Norths to meet murder in a novel. And it is to this novel, plus the fugitive sketches which first appeared in the New Yorker, that Owen Davis has turned for the ingredients of that ingratiating little play Mr. de Liagre produced last evening.

As devoted followers of Mr. and Mrs. North must know, the murder play in which they are involved is not apt to conflict with the wild horrors and giddy humors of such a corpse-strewn farcical melodrama as "Arsenic and Old Lace." Where Mr. Kesselring's opus

is gorgeously deranged, the script Mr. Davis has put together with skill from the stories of the Lockridges is highly sensible. The one is noisy and wonderfully inventive; the other is quiet and highly probable. If "Arsenic and Old Lace" is made delectable by everything that is gleefully exceptional in its details, "Mr. and Mrs. North" is made pleasant by everything at once likable and average in its people.

Duly Involved in Murder

Although two bodies are discovered in the

course of "Mr. and Mrs. North," and the plot is an uninspired bud of the "whodunnit" variety, the real interest of an evening, both gentle and amusing, centers in the man and wife in whose comfortable apartment the dead men happen to be found. Mr. North is a nice young fellow, intelligent and friendly, whose wife is as irrational as she is pretty and as flighty as she is winning.

Let such a young couple find, first, one corpse in their liquor closet, and then another in their kitchen, and what would happen to them and to their friends? This is the question asked and answered in mild but agreeable terms at the Belasco. Needless to say, before a slight, though entertaining, evening is over, the young Dulcy who is Mrs. North has come perilously close to landing her husband and herself in the electric chair. What nearly lands them there is their character as people rather than the plot in which they are involved. For what the Norths are as individuals is always the most compelling aspect of a character-comedy which just happens to deal with murder and the solution of a crime.

Mr. de Liagre has given "Mr. and Mrs. North" a capable and persuasive production. Mr. Mielziner has provided it with a livable and charming setting. And it is excellently played by Philip Ober and Millard Mitchell as the policemen who appear on the premises, and above all, by Albert Hackett and Peggy Conklin as Mr. and Mrs. North. Mr. Hackett admirably suggests, in the most natural and average of terms, the human and tender aspects of the sorely tried husband. And Miss Conklin brilliantly established what is at once daffy and winning in his light-headed spouse. If the evening is slight, and at times a trifle slow, it should nonetheless prove diverting, especially to those who are willing to accept it on its own quiet terms.

"Mr. and Mrs. North"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 13, 1941

'Mr. and Mrs. North' Is One About Folks Who Never Killed Anybody

"Mr. and Mrs. North," comedy by Owen Davis, based on stories by Frances and Richard Lockridge. Produced by Alfred de Llagre Jr., at the Belasco Theatre, New York, Jan. 12, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THIS being a fine year for murder, including stage murder, we will have to begin drawing distinctions. "Mr. and Mrs. North," the Owen Davis piece that was offered at the Belasco Theatre last night, is the one about the folks who never dunit.

I like it. These are real folk caught in a web of plausible and amusing situations. There is laughter in it and a touch of sentiment, a craftily sustained suspense and not more than a dash of the old murder play hokum.

Last night's audience liked it. Which would indicate that those who frequent first nights are not yet fed up with this season's generous dose of the Cock Robin drama.

The audience liked it, I think, because with Peggy Conklin and Albert Hackett playing the Norths of Greenwich Place, the evening's adventure swirls around two definitely appealing young persons.

In With the Liquor

And what an adventure! Imagine! The Norths walk out of their apartment in the Village one October afternoon, are gone for twenty-four hours, and return to find a cadaver in the liquor closet!

There are, naturally, a series of unexplained activities on the part of the Norths and their friends. And the usual questioning by the police.

But, happily, Mr. Davis has been able to keep the investigation on the comedy side. Little Mrs. North is an awful chatterbox. Only by expert writing and playing is she kept this side of becoming something of a trial.

Young Mr. North is an honest young fellow whose slant at life is quizzical and whose appreciation of his chattering wife is understanding and affectionate.

Being suspected of murder is a lot of fun to Mrs. North, but a bit of a bore to Mr. North.

What if she did write a letter asking the murdered man to come to the apartment the day he was killed? She had a reason, hadn't she? Answer Mrs. North that.

And what if Mr. North did take a walk in Central Park while the murder was going on? Can't a man take a walk without being suspected of everything that might happen in his apartment? You tell him.

A New Yorker Year

The original story, "The Norths Meet Murder," from which Mr. Davis evolved the comedy, was written by Frances and Richard Lockridge, whose contributions to the New Yorker Magazine are familiar to readers of that publication. Mr. Lockridge is the drama critic of the New York Sun, and naturally knows what's what in stage mysteries.

This incidentally, is a New Yorker year in the theatre—"My Sister Eileen," "Pal Joey" and "Mr. and Mrs. North" all got their start in Harold Ross's editorial department.

The performances at the Belasco are spirited and expert. Miss Conklin and Mr. Hackett, as intimated, are excellently cast. Their support is well chosen. Philip Ober and Millard Mitchell keep the detectives out of too familiar grooves. Tito Vuolo, Barbara Woodell, Owen Davis Jr., Lewis Martin and Lex Lindsay have the better short parts and Frank Wilcox adds a nice bit as a friendly postman.

I would not say that the real murderer's story is convincingly alright, but by the time he has to tell it the evening's fun has been delivered.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 13, 1941

Mr. and Mrs. North Real, Interesting Characters

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

WHETHER engaged in the inconsequential chatter of domestic trivia or the momentous implications of murder, two of my favorite fictional characters are Mr. and Mrs. North, the happy creations of Richard Lockridge. The Sun's drama critic. And now, having become better acquainted with this engaging couple in a play concocted by Owen Davis out of one of Mr. and Mrs. Lockridge's mystery stories, my warm friendship for them continues unabated.

Mr. Davis' play suffers, I think, from the circumstances of its being the third of a cycle of murder plays to arrive in hurried sequence on Broadway, and particularly from having followed the cheerfully gruesome *Arsenic and Old Lace* with its homicides in wholesale lots. But if it lacks the comic impact of that murder epidemic, it gains a great deal in the understanding and charming portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Lockridge's chief characters, the Norths.

In other words, I find the North family more interesting and real and believable than I do the strange situation into which the authors have thrown them.

.....
This is not to say that the new murder play is not good, substantial fun, but merely to point out that it is at its best in those passages that emphasize or illuminate the basic humor of the Lockridge essays.

Mr. North, as you may know, represents the sanity, common sense and practicality of the male. Mrs. North is composed entirely of charming feminine weaknesses—irrational reasoning, maddening intuition and conversational irrelevance regarding any subject that happens to be under discussion. And, as is always the case with these delightful women, she turns out to be exactly right on all occasions. That is what is so baffling about these helter-skelter minds.

In this case Mr. and Mrs. North arrive home at their apartment and, upon going to a closet to get the makings of a cocktail, are confronted by the body of a gentleman

whose head had been bashed in. It looks rather bad for Mrs. North, who has done a little innocent equivocations about her movements of the previous day, and for Mr. North, who can only explain that at the time the murder was committed he was taking a walk in Central Park. Furthermore, when it is discovered that the murdered man was at the North apartment by written invitation of Mrs. North there is considerable explaining to do. A second murder helps to solve the first and eventually, you will be glad to know, Mr. and Mrs. North are absolved and plan to move to another apartment, where, as Mrs. North brightly remarks, "there will be less closet space."

.....
Mr. Davis has captured the humor and flavor of the Lockridge writing, with loving attention to the non sequitur arguments that make up much of Mrs. North's everyday speech, and in his characterization of her husband he has not, fortunately, demeaned him to the position of a mere stooge.

Mr. North is genuine.
Alfred de Llagre gave Mr. and Mrs. North the best possible kind of cast. Miss Peggy Conklin is back on Broadway again, making excellent use of her bright, vivacious personality as the feather-brained Mrs. North. Albert Hackett, after a slow start, hurled himself confidently into the role of Mr. North and, particularly in the second and third acts gave an exceptionally witty performance.

Philip Ober and Millard Mitchell were the two puzzled detectives who were almost but not quite forced to arrest the Norths, and both contributed heavily to the humor of the evening. Horace Cooper, among the minor figures, added high comedy to the proceedings by his impersonation of a Fuller brush man and the remainder of the cast provided good team work.

Mr. and Mrs. North is a welcome addition to the season's theatrical criminology.

"Mr. and Mrs. North"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 13, 1941

'Mr. and Mrs. North' Premiere at the Belasco

Peggy Conklin and Albert Hackett Play Buoyant Chatterboxes
in Comedy of Assassinations

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH "Mr. and Mrs. North" is a murder mystery, its chief interest at the Belasco seems to lie in its principal characters, a cheerful young couple, whose Greenwich Village apartment turns in quite a tidy quota of assassinations during the evening.

They and their peculiar behavior have been dramatized by Owen Davis from the sketches by Frances and Richard Lockridge, and the result is a half-way amusing comedy which makes homicide rather placid and conversational, although no one is actually talked to death.

The somewhat one-dimensional characters of the title are played delightfully by Peggy Conklin and Albert Hackett, as a pair of buoyant chatterboxes, and while I found their doings fresh and clever for an act and a half, the charm wore thin and dim monotony usurped the stage.

If you have ever met the Norths in the enamelled pages of the New Yorker, you will know that Mrs. N. has a brain so scattered that it can be virtually dismantled without interfering with what passes for thought.

Compared to her, Gracie Allen would seem a giant of concentrated intellect, so you can just about guess how far the police get when they ask her where she was on Monday, the 5th, and find themselves hopelessly entangled in a discussion of lobster sauce. She had merely opened a closet in the apartment and out fell the body and then the dialogue.

Charming Nitwit

This charming nitwit is entertaining enough for a while, but she is never observed with satiric sharpness and the device which

makes her funny loses its punch. The tangential and complicated answers she gives develop slowly into an elaborate machinery of interference and become faintly trying.

The humor arising from her staidous understatement tends toward sameness and doesn't last out the evening. It is all very well when the authors are drawing her as a character, but once their story is under way it begins to stumble over her and winds up so suddenly with the confession of the murderer that even the actors looked a little astonished, as if they had just noticed it was 11 o'clock.

Since the Lockridge sketches were frankly sketches, embellished pleasantly with literary humor, Mr. Davis, being an experienced playwright, must have known the necessity for giving them substance on the stage. Yet the friends of the Norths, who are brought into focus by the murderers, seem detached and almost irrelevant.

Just Introduced

They sounded as if they had just been introduced on the stairway, en route to the cast of characters, and the odd behavior of the detectives suggested that Mrs. North's mental condition might be contagious. They had an informal way of having the Norths ask the other suspects to drop in socially for a little grilling.

This disarming air of absurd unreality is, of course, an entertaining quality, but too flimsy to sustain an evening when it gets snarled up with clues and the factual items of a murder mystery. Mr. North's exasperated efforts to keep his wife's mind in some sort of order is amusing, too, but beyond a certain point it merely arouses wonder why there wasn't another murder before the evening was out.

Mr. de Liagre has assembled and directed an admirable cast to support the two principals, and Philip Ober, Millard Mitchell, Owen Davis, Jr., and Tito Vuolo all help to enliven proceedings which start off at a fine pitch and dwindle sadly.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 13, 1941

'Mr. and Mrs. North' Encounter Murder in Owen Davis' Drama Made From Lockridge Stories

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NO ONE nowadays keeps a straight face in the presence of murder, least of all "Mr. and Mrs. North," who learned about it at the Belasco last evening. For these are the humorously vacuous characters that Richard Lockridge, drama critic of The Sun, first invented for The New Yorker several years ago, and that his wife, Frances, has conspired with him to put into crime fiction more recently. Owen Davis, the protean playwright, has now made a murder comedy out of the urban adventures of the Norths. In a state of general wonder, the Norths are constantly tripping over harsh facts.

As played by Albert Hackett and Peggy Conklin, they are amusing people with some odd, bright lines to speak in the presence of corpses. Last evening's audience took to them in friendliest fashion and seemed to be having a good time. This department finds itself in an awkward position. It has known the Lockridges a long time. It has often sought refuge in their Washington Place apartment after a bout at the Provincetown, taking a drop on the house to make the world look four-rosy again. But it is bound to confess that it was only temperately amused last evening. "Mr. and Mrs. North" never quite acquired the momentum of a going play.

To preserve the literary amenities, the

Norths are living in Greenwich Place in the play, although they keep a cat, which to those of us who are on the inside, lets the secret out of the bag. After being away over night, they return home, go to the liquor closet for a while, and a body falls out—a good body, too, for it does not perceptibly breathe. After the police come and start to work it appears that the Norths have some queer friends. In the course of time it appears that two or three of them have plausible motives. As a former Columbia student the police lieutenant is a pleasant-mannered chap who is reluctant to suspect any well-dressed person. But Mrs. North, who does not retain very well, manages to chatter up

an air-tight case against one of her friends in the last scene.

By nature the Norths are irrelevant. Although the corpse gives them a start, they quickly accept it as another irritation in the vapid flow of modern life. And the humor of "Mr. and Mrs. North" is to treat a murder in their apartment as a routine social event, involving cocktails for the police and the usual civilities all around. To Mrs. North, whose mind is at once active and disorderly, tracking down the murderer is also an exciting game, especially since the police lieutenant is a charming fellow. But the irrelevant point of view must be regarded as a mixed blessing, for it frequently loses contact with the main motive of the play. Running on occasionally at random, it leaves the story occasionally at loose ends, and it is not funny enough to create a ground swell of its own.

As his own director, Mr. de Liagre has staged the play amiably with a good many amusing anecdotes by the way. Albert Hackett's air of ineffectual politeness and well-bred surprise is wholly entertaining in the part of Mr. North, and Peggy Conklin's charm keeps Mrs. North's informality from being the annoyance it probably is. Philip Ober acts the police lieutenant pleasantly. As the detective, Millard Mitchell takes his usual sardonic enjoyment in what goes on. Owen Davis, Jr., as one of the suspects, represents chivalry with a good deal of manly indignation. As another suspect, Lewis Martin is properly bland. Jo Mielainer has designed a Greenwich Village apartment as it should be, but never is unless Jo Mielainer designs it.

Apparently, Mrs. North's style of thought is not only irrelevant but contagious. It certainly makes it hard for Mr. Davis to write a play that rolls along briskly from here to there. Last evening, to tell the truth, it prevented this theatregoer from enjoying "Mr. and Mrs. North" as wholeheartedly as the audience did.

"Arsenic and Old Lace"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 11, 1941

"Arsenic and Old Lace," Hilarious Burlesque, Opens at the Fulton

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

TWO or three fantastically funny plays, known generically as "Arsenic and Old Lace," opened last evening at the Fulton Theater. Gentle old maids concealed bodies in window seats and left them there to be discovered by young drama critics who hated the theater. Boris Karloff, looking perfectly horrible, burlesqued himself while he prepared tortures for lamblike victims. A happy loony fancied himself to be Teddy Roosevelt and charged furiously up stairs, blowing a bugle.

This may give you some faint idea of the lunatic broth Joseph Kesselring has stirred up, with maybe a good deal of help from Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.

It can hardly give you more than a faint idea, because "Arsenic and Old Lace," starting from a preposterous premise, goes off so comically in so many directions that the mind boggles even when in direct contact. It is about as difficult to keep track of as a three-ring circus, which in many respects it closely resembles.

It starts, as everybody surely knows by now, with a pair of gentle aunts who have fallen, more or less by accident, into the quaint habit of poisoning elderly gentlemen and concealing the left-over bodies in the cellar. (They have perfectly fine funerals for all their victims, and are careful to ascertain church affiliations in advance.) The critical nephew stumbles on this family custom one September afternoon and is—well, surprised. It is at this point that words begin to seem a little inadequate.

For this, enough for a good play, is only

the beginning. The author has a couple more plays up his sleeve. Mr. Karloff, not at all disguised as another nephew with sadistic mania, happens in. He brings along a body of his own. He prepares, on a fearsomely darkened stage, the torture of his brother, laying shiny instruments in straight rows. A policeman who is practicing to be a playwright intervenes and talks everybody to sleep. A girl keeps popping up. Bodies are constantly being lugged across the dark stage. None of this, as you will readily believe, makes sense.

But almost all of it makes fun. The first act, which pivots entirely on the quaint practices of the spinsters, is uninterruptedly hilarious. The second act, while not as funny as the first, is mighty comical and the last is gagged to the hilt. Possibly there are too many gags. It may be that the stairs are

"ARSENIC AND OLD LACE"

A comedy in three acts by Joseph Kesselring; staged by Bretaigne Windust; setting by Raymond Sovey; presented at the Fulton Theater on January 10, 1941, by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse.

The cast:
Abby Brewster.....Josephine Hull
The Rev. Dr. Harper.....Wynley Birch
Teddy Brewster.....John Alexander
Officer Brophy.....John Quigg
Officer Klein.....Bruce Gordon
Martha Brewster.....Jean Adair
Helen Brooks.....Helen Brooks
Mortimer Brewster.....Allyn Joslyn
Mr. Gibbs.....Henry Herbert
Jonathan Brewster.....Boris Karloff
Einstein.....Edgar Stehli
Officer O'Hara.....Anthony Ross
Lieutenant Rooney.....Victor Sutherland
Mr. Witherspoon.....William Parke

charged once or twice too often by Teddy Roosevelt Brewster. It is even conceivable that one or two of the states of horrified astonishment required of Allyn Joslyn could wisely have been eliminated. But "Arsenic and Old Lace" is no play to carp over. It is a noisy, preposterous, incoherent joke. It is hard to remember when acting more delightful has come along than that contributed by Josephine Hull and Jean Adair as the maiden murderers. Miss Hull, particularly, is without recent parallel in comedy. Mr. Joslyn is broadly funny as the drama critic—funnier, I think, than most of the cracks Mr. Kesselring takes at drama critics. Mr. Karloff, whose startling suspense to Mr. Karloff is constantly commented upon by the other characters, manages to be horrifying without really scaring the audience out of its wits. Edgar Stehli, as a policeman, plays again as Karloff's villainous aid and parts with his inevitable skill, and gay bits are contributed by many others. You wouldn't believe homicidal mania could be such great fun.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 11, 1941

"Arsenic and Old Lace" Makes Murder Hilarious

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN THE course of that uproarious mixture of goofiness and gore, of craziness and cadavers, of merriment and murder which took possession of the Fulton last night under the title of "Arsenic and Old Lace," one of the characters suggests that what is happening is what might have occurred had Strindberg written "Hellsapoppin." This character, being a dramatic critic, is, of course, right. His correctness merely proves he is suffering from an occupational disease. The only wonder is that he has the forbearance to stop where he does.

For the play by Joseph Kesselring, with which Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have turned producers, is a constant

and hilariously sustained study in contrasts. No wonder it has to travel under the happy name of "Arsenic and Old Lace." Should Strindberg and "Hellsapoppin" fail to place for you its side-splitting juxtaposition of horror and hilarity, try any unlikely combination of your choice. Say Mr. Kesselring's farcical melodrama is like "Rope's End" crossed with "You Can't Take It With You." Couple DeQuincey with Stephen Leacock. Or, in endeavoring to place it, insist that the season's newest hit is what "Murders in the Rue Morgue" might have resembled had Luther Burbank brought it into contact with "Alice in Wonderland."

Even so "Arsenic and Old Lace" eludes classification. Although the Mad Hatter's touch is definitely upon its mixture of the ghoulish and the gay, the play goes its own independent way quite giddily. It is the kind of play that, just when it is threatening to

make you scream with terror, compels you to scream with laughter.

It takes life as lightly as it takes death. It is awed by neither. Both the risibilities and the sensibilities are taken for a ride. Therein no doubt lies its power to make the macabre merry. For it can, and does, raise many a laugh from the dead.

Grand Fun

Imagine two sweet elderly ladies who, out of sheer kindness, poison the lonely old gentlemen that come as lodgers to their Brooklyn home and bury them in the cellar. Endow these two sisters, who believe in straining the quality of mercy, with three brothers—one of whom is mad enough to be a dramatic critic; another of whom is a public enemy resembling Boris Karloff; and the third of whom, because he thinks he is Theodore Roosevelt, is always charg-

ing up the living room stairs, convinced they are San Juan Hill, or disappearing into the basement under the impression it is Panama. Provide some victims, a love affair, a family feud, and a few policemen. And you may have as much idea of what goes on in "Arsenic and Old Lace" as it is fair for a sane reviewer to reveal. But, until you have journeyed to the Fulton (as, of course, you will), you can have no notion of the satisfying mixture of suspense and insanity which is there in store for you.

Neither can you guess in advance at the rightness of Raymond Sovey's setting; the skill of Bretaigne Windust's direction; or the excellence of the performances given by Josephine Hull and Jean Adair as the daffy sisters. Or by John Alexander as the brother who thinks he is T. R. Or by Allyn Joslyn as the dramatic critic who knows the meaning of the Nora Hayes. Or by Boris Karloff who, as the sinister brother, must at moments even frighten himself.

An Excellent Cast

Although all the performances are good, the chirrupy Miss Hull, with her wondrous waddle and her sly comedy, has never been better, not even as the neighbor in "Craig's Wife" or as the mad mother of the mad Sycamores in "You Can't Take It With You."

Miss Adair also enters into the uncanny spirit of the proceedings with delectable relish and disarming innocence. Mr. Alexander's Teddy Roosevelt is convulsively played; a creation of endless restraint and yet abounding lunacy. Mr. Joslyn is worthy of full honors from, if not admission to, the Critics Circle because of the intelligence with which he impersonates a reviewer who is at once a globe-trotter interested in politics and a bird-lover devoted to Thoreau. And Mr. Karloff is a bogeyman who could make gooseflesh, at any rate, out of a sow's ear.

Although there are several dead spots in "Arsenic and Old Lace" which the Brewsters have not planned, these do not really matter. There is more than enough life to go around among such moonstruck murderers. The evening is at once so side-splitting and terrific that it can be guaranteed to make even dramatic critics care for the theatre.

"Arsenic and Old Lace"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 11, 1941

'Arsenic and Old Lace' Opens at the Fulton

Boris Karloff Appears in Mystery Comedy by Joseph Kesselring

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS THE author of "Arsenic and Old Lace" Joseph Kesselring knows it is more fun to scream with laughter than with terror, so his new play at the Fulton presents Boris Karloff not only in person but in a hilarious thriller that raises your hair and then the roof.

Every shudder it sends down the spine lands with a crash on the funnybone. Every time it lures you to the edge of the seat in horror it lets you fall back laughing helplessly. It is a crazy combination of homicide and nonsense, the sort of peculiar mixture you might get if you put Ed Wynn in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" or Bea Lillie in "The House of Usher." In the exact meaning of the words it is frightfully funny.

If my records are right Mr. Kesselring's only previous connection with the drama was an obscure play called "Cross Town" which was seen briefly hereabouts four years ago. But his producers are no less than the Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, who, among other things, dramatised "Life with Father," and who might as well have called this "Death with Aunt Abby."

Trumpet in the Night

Aunt Abby and Aunt Martha are two elderly Brooklyn spinsters living placidly in the ancient Brewster mansion, close by, as luck would have it, a pleasant, old-fashioned cemetery. The Brewsters have always been a little peculiar, but the old girls are a trifle upset over the way the family taint works out in Nephew Mortimer. Poor Mor-

timer is a New York drama critic. His critical impulse to slaughter seemed, in a way, a literary expression of his great uncle's desire to practice surgery on people without first going to medical school.

Then there was Uncle Teddy Brewster who lived with his graciously murderous sisters. Early in life he had got himself confused with Teddy Roosevelt and went around looking exactly like the Rough Rider and referring to himself as the President. Once they tried to persuade him that he might be George Washington so he wouldn't blow a trumpet in the middle of the night, but he sulked under his bed for a week, fearing that he wasn't anybody.

Things had been going on like that a good many years when one night, as he was dashing off to review a play, Mortimer looked in the big window seat and saw . . . Oh, I can't tell you what he saw, but his

dear old aunts soothed him off to the theatre and told him to forget all about it and everything would be all right.

He was no sooner out of the house than the lanky appalling shadow of dear Uncle Jonathan fell across the threshold and in came Boris Karloff and Dr. Einstein—not Albert, he explained, but Herman, who always changed Uncle Johnny's face when it got too familiar to the police. Poor Uncle Jonathan sighed wistfully for the face he had lost after that business in Melbourne, but he sighed even more for a place to lay his head and that strange long bundle in the rumble seat of the car. The Brewsters were about as nice a family as you could meet this side of the Borgia's.

Mr. Kesselring has done a brilliant job in mixing the macabre and horrible with characters that seem to be just little rays of cock-eyed sunshine. He takes his situations to the verge of hideous crime, and then lets them veer off in elliptical humor that pitches the fun higher still because it is such a relief from the sickening tension of horror. It would be a terrific melodrama, if it weren't so crazily amusing, and a wild farce if it didn't make the flesh creep all the way to Broadway.

Deft Dialogue

The dialogue is extraordinarily deft, and matches exactly the swift changes in the play's mood, and Bretaigne Windust has directed it with superb mastery of the dizzy inflections, and with a cast that is practically perfect.

Mr. Karloff has charge of most of the horror and he is overpoweringly sinister in a performance that would, I should think, scare the other actors out of their makeup. Josephine Hull is wonderful as a ducky little murderess and Jean Adair portrays as sweet an old killer as Mr. Kesselring can imagine, which is plenty. John Alexander makes Uncle Teddy hilariously amusing, and Allyn Joslyn does the best of all his excellent jobs as the bewildered critic-nephew. It is some sort of a break for criticism, I suppose, when they find he really isn't a Brewster after all. Just naturally gentle.

Mr. Sovey's single setting is exactly right in atmosphere and the First Audience saluted these events with the usual signals of a hit. It just laughed and laughed and shuddered and shuddered.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 11, 1941

Joseph Kesselring's 'Arsenic and Old Lace' Turns Murder Into Fantastic Comedy

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LET'S not exaggerate. At some time there may have been a funnier murder charade than "Arsenic and Old Lace," which was acted at the Fulton last evening. But the supposition is purely academic. For Joseph Kesselring has written one so funny that none of us will ever forget it and Bretaigne Windust has directed it like a man inspired.

It may not seem hilarious to report that thirteen men succumb to one of the blandest murder games ever played in Brooklyn. But Mr. Kesselring has a light style, an original approach to an old subject, and he manages to dispense with all the hocus-focus of the crime trade. Swift, dry, satirical and exciting, "Arsenic and Old Lace" kept the first-night audience roaring with laughter. Although there have been some other good plays recently, this is the freshest invention. It is full of chuckles even when the scene is gruesome by nature.

As a matter of fact, the Brewsters of Brooklyn are homicidal maniacs. But Aunt Abby and Aunt Martha are, on the surface, two of the nicest maiden ladies who ever baked biscuits, rushed hot soup to ailing neighbors and invited the minister to tea. Part of their charitable work consists in poisoning homeless old men who have no

families to look after them. Their lunatic brother, who, for no apparent reason, imagines that he is Theodore Roosevelt, buries the bodies in the cellar with military and presidential flourishes.

If their brightest nephew who, of course, is a drama critic, had not discovered a body under the window seat, the murder game might have continued indefinitely. But he is normal, although naturally more brilliant than ordinary people and he is so upset that he can only stay one act at the play he is supposed to review that evening. The riotous amusement of "Arsenic and Old Lace" consists in his attempt to keep the murders a

secret and, at the same time, to commit his dear aunts to an institution where their foibles will be stopped.

Nothing in Mr. Kesselring's record has prepared us for the humor and ingenuity of "Arsenic and Old Lace." He wrote "There's Wisdom in Women" in 1935 and "Cross Town" in 1937. But his murder drama is compact with plot and comic situation. In addition to the homey aunts it includes a sinister maniac who looks enough like Boris Karloff to be Boris Karloff, which as a matter of fact he is. The lines are bright. The story is mad and unhackneyed. Although the scene is always on the verge of the macabre and the atmosphere is horribly ominous, Mr. Kesselring does not have to stoop to stock scenes, pistol shots or lethal screams to get his effects. He has written a murder play as legitimate as farce-comedy.

Mr. Windust's direction ample credit. In the casting and in the tone of the performance it preserves the casual point of view that is so robustly entertaining. There hardly is sweeter ladies than the two played by Josephine Hull and Jean Adair. Allyn Joslyn gives an amazingly humorous and resourceful performance as the frightened drama critic. As the evil one, Mr. Karloff moves quietly through plot and poison without resorting to trickeries, and Edgar Stehlé is light footed in the part of a satellite. As the cop who wants to write a play and tell the plot to a drama critic, Anthony Ross is also amusing. Helen Brooks plays the drama critic's baffled fiancée with patience and spirit.

All the comic rag-tag and bob-tail occurs inside Raymond Sovey's setting of a decaying Brooklyn mansion. "Arsenic and Old Lace" has been produced by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, who wrote the stage version of "Life with Father." Perhaps that gives you the idea.

"Arsenic and Old Lace"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 11, 1941

"Arsenic and Old Lace" Is a Killing Comedy About Brooklyn

"Arsenic and Old Lace," comedy by Joseph Kesselring. Produced by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse at the Fulton Theatre, New York, Jan. 10, 1941.

★ ★ ★
By BURNS MANTLE

THE audience at the Fulton Theatre last night simply howled itself red in the face at the goings on that furnish the comedy in Joseph Kesselring's "Arsenic and Old Lace."

And there sat Mantle, sober as a judge and twice as unhappy most of the time, simply because he is one of those old kill joys who can't get much fun out of comic murders and sweetly insane old ladies who poison lonely old gentlemen and bury their remains in the cellar.

You see Mantle has spent a good part of his playgoing life judging plays on the basis of their truth, or approximate truth, in the reflection of life and character.

Whether it be in farce or tragedy. He is a cold fish when it comes to plays that represent no more than the fantastic imaginations of farce builders on the loose. The believable drama, that's his weakness.

And yet how unfair such a reaction can be to thousands of playgoers who insist, petulantly, that what they go to the theatre for is to be amused; and why should they pretend to care whether a situation or a character is plausible, or even a good imitation, so long as they are amused?

All right, let the issue stand. For those who find a happy escape in the play that doesn't pretend to be anything but a preposterous romp with amusing shadows "Arsenic and Old Lace" is a swell farce, expertly staged, brilliantly played.

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse are backing it with a share of their profits from "Life With Father." They should, I suspect,

be entitled at least to an assist in pointing up the dialogue, which crackles with wit and is perfectly timed.

Jonathan Left

It is the story of the Brewsters of Brooklyn. They always were a little queer, you may have heard. Lived in one of those dear old brownstone fronts with mahogany paneled rooms.

Jonathan was the older brother who wanted to be a great surgeon and practiced cutting up worms with his teeth. Jonathan finally ran away, went in for murder in a big way, had his face lifted to escape the law and came to look a lot like Boris Karloff, the erst-while Frankenstein monster.

Then there are Aunt Abby and Aunt Martha, the darlings. They have a lot of the

old Brewster in them, too. They used to advertise for roomers, and when the applicants turned out to be lonely old gentlemen they fed them elderberry wine seasoned with "a tablespoon of arsenic, a half tablespoon of strychnine, and a pinch of cyanide."

They had buried twelve of these old duffers in the cellar, but not until they had held respectful funeral services over their remains, be they Baptist, Methodist or even Presbyterian.

And then there is Teddy Brewster. Ted is harmless, but he thinks he is Teddy Roosevelt and goes screaming up "San Juan Hill" whenever he starts upstairs. The cellar, to Teddy, is Panama, and all the victims, lying row on row, are yellow fever victims.

Mortimer Is a Critic

Finally there is Mortimer, but Mortimer, happily, is a drama critic—or, as the text has it, a bastard—and can therefore marry the ingenue in the end and escape the Brewster curse. Rather a bright drama critic, too.

So, there you have "Arsenic and Old Lace." The most impressive job of farce comedy casting and staging that has been offered hereabouts since "You Can't Take It With You" was the hit of its season. And winding up with a corking series of stage calls.

Josephine Hull and Jean Adair are perfect as the Aunts. Boris Karloff in person is Jonathan to the life. Allyn Joslyn joins in nervously and effectively as the same Mortimer. John Alexander gives a good performance and a perfect duplicate in picture of the Teddy he is supposed to be. And there are short parts excellently played by Helen Brooks, Edgar Stehl, Anthony Ross, Wyrley Birch and others.

So—what about the rating? Three? That's a bit strong. Two plus? No, it's better than that. What then? Well, why not the old compromise, Three minus? All right. Shoot!

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," January 12, 1941

So You Don't Think Corpses Are Funny?

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE theater, which is several thousand years old, has never produced anything quite like *Arsenic and Old Lace*. And in case you're not impressed by the fact that it's different and unusual, you might like to know it's also screamingly funny.

There have been farce melodramas in the past, and burlesque thrillers, and tongue-in-cheek murder mysteries, but after Friday night they don't count. For on Friday night certain truths came to light at the Fulton Theater which nobody could possibly have guessed before, and which psychologists may wish to ponder. It can now be positively stated, for example, that horror is the mother of hilarity; that corpses are as comical as Ed Wynn; and that maniacs are the salt of the earth.

You will find that these aphorisms hold water a lot better after a visit to the Brewster home in Brooklyn than before it. In this faded and genteel atmosphere live two maiden ladies, the sweetest, kindest, most warm-hearted maiden ladies imaginable. They would be quite irreproachable, in fact, except that

they make a hobby of murdering homeless old men by offering them elder-ber-ry wine with poison in it.

With them lives a young nephew who fancies that he is Teddy Roosevelt, and who is delighted to bury their victims in the cellar under the impression that he is digging the Panama Canal. When the play opens, eleven quaffers lie neatly interred and a twelfth is

hidden under the window seat pending funeral arrangements.

Into this sunny atmosphere are thrust two other nephews of the Misses Brewster. One, sinister and rather violent, comes home after having committed an assortment of maniacal murders in most of the capitals of the world. The other nephew is a drama critic, sane by comparison; and in between reviewing plays, he is kept busy trying to bundle his relatives off to a comfy little booby hatch before the Flatbush police can step in and whisk them off to a worse place.

San Juan Hill

It's a very merry evening, with Teddy Roosevelt charging up the staircase under the delusion that it's San Juan Hill; with the ladies sweetly pressing their elderberry wine on a variety of guests; with corpses being shifted around in inky blackness; with the scary nephew and his doctor pal proving consistently homicidal; and with the drama critic—who, I regret to say, has points in common with Mr. Watts of the *Herald Tribune* and Mr. Atkinson of the *Times*—trying to cope with all this and yet maintain his theater schedule.

A very good production enhances the show's lunatic laughter. Bretaigne Winnet has directed it with great liveliness. Allyn Joslyn plays the theater critic agreeably. John Alexander gets a lot of fun out of being T. R., and as the most malign of the nephews, Boris Karloff is all that Boris Karloff is known to be. But it is Jean Adair and Josephine Hull, as the maiden ladies, who take top honors; and Miss Hull tops Miss Adair.

"Arsenic and Old Lace"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 11, 1941

Murder in Brooklyn

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE chances are that murder is not essentially a funny subject. As a matter of fact, insanity is probably not an essentially humorous topic, either, and I sometimes even doubt that dramatic critics make ideal melodramatic heroes. Yet, "Arsenic and Old Lace," which mixes wholesale homicide, madness and a play reviewer in one maniacal whole, turns out to be the most riotously hilarious comedy of the season. Some years ago there was another humorous homicide play by Damon Runyon called "A Slight Case of Murder," which seemed to me pretty comic, too. But in showmanship and general audience excitement, the new work by Joseph Kesselring is decidedly its superior. Excellently acted by a fine cast that includes the cinema horror man, Boris Karloff, in an ideal role, and directed with unusual expertness by Bretaigne Windust, "Arsenic and Old Lace" proves that the dramatic season is just hitting its stride. There can be little doubt of its great success.

This is the idyllic saga of two darling little old maiden ladies, known throughout Brooklyn for the kindness of their hearts. They were sweet and gracious and lovable, and they could not stand to see any one lonely and unhappy. In fact, they were so loath to see suffering of any kind that when they came upon any friendless old gentlemen, they invariably gave them a good drink of fine old elderberry wine, and since the wine happened to be poisoned, the old gentlemen were graciously put out of their misery. Then

they quietly buried their philanthropies in the cellar and went modestly on with their lives. In fact, their existence might never have been troubled, save for a few eccentric nephews who were occasionally a nuisance. One nephew was an amiable fellow who thought he was Theodore Roosevelt and was always blowing his bugle and charging up San Juan Hill. Another was a murderous fellow who had been made to look like Boris Karloff by a movie-crazed plastic surgeon, and was pretty mad about it. The third and most troublesome was a drama critic, who, it was feared, might some day get to like the theater.

Since this is the first time I have ever appeared as approximately one-third of the hero of a play, I will perhaps be forgiven for saying that this dramatic critic interested

me particularly. A dashing, restless and romantic fellow, who had a way of darting off to China and Spain between plays, he seems to me by far the most fascinating dramatic figure of the season, and his boldness when faced by terror, torture and death should be a fine example to all of you. I believe that there are traces of my friends, Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Nathan, in this epic hero, too, and since the play reviewer of "Arsenic and Old Lace" is a composite of such gentlemen of the Drama Critics' Circle, it is not at all surprising that he is handsome, witty and fearless, if a bit scatterbrained at moments. Perhaps, though, I should be telling you of less personal matters in connection with the new play. Let me say, therefore, that while the thrills are surprisingly authentic and the comedy is genuinely uproarious, the abiding feature of the entertainment is that an incredible air of sweetness hangs about this farcical melodramatic insanity.

This added, and, I think, life-saving virtue is the result of the excellence of the acting. You could not find two more delightful and motherly old ladies than Miss Josephine Hull and Miss Jean Adair, and they assuredly make the two most winning murderesses of the century. Then, too, John Alexander is such a charming and friendly lunatic as the happy fellow who is convinced that he is Theodore Roosevelt that he becomes one of the delightful characters of the season. Mr. Karloff proves to be a highly effective actor, with just the proper combination of the sinister and the humorous and without ever overdoing either aspect. A really expert performer, this Mr. Karloff. Ailyn Joslyn, always a talented farceur, is properly heroic as the composite critic, and Anthony Ross as a policeman who wants to be a playwright is excellent. As usual, Edgar Stehlé is splendid as the plastic surgeon and accomplice of the sinister Mr. Karloff. The lesser players are effective. "Arsenic and Old Lace" is such a funny show that even its curtain calls are richly comic.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 11, 1941

Arsenic and Old Lace Proves Amusing

Lovely Murder Play Featured by Good Acting

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

NOT so many years ago a lady went to the chair in Chicago after having been convicted of poisoning a large number of elderly folk who had regarded her as a ministering angel. This lady told the police that her mission in life was to make other people comfy. Then there was Belle Gunness (I think that was the name, at any rate) who made her boarders comfy in a few feet of rich soil on her farm at Laporte, Ind. And a little man named Powers, down in West Virginia, who buried a succession of fiances near his garage, and who was caught by the circumstances of so many flowers growing in profusion over their graves.

The actions of these indiscreet criminals, who were unable to take murder or leave it alone, came forcibly to mind last night at the unfolding of Arsenic and Old Lace, a new comedy by Joseph Kesselring, which boasts as one of its assets the presence of Boris Karloff in his own creepy flesh.

When I tell you that the curtain rises upon two dear old ladies giving tea to the rector and ends with their gentle administrations of poison to the warden of an asylum, and that this brings their total bag of victims to 13 (as against the mere dozen done in by their brother, Mr. Karloff) you will at once realize what a night of fascinating horror Arsenic and Old Lace turns out to be.

I note that Mr. Kesselring calls his play a

comedy and I think he is amply justified, for if the situations he devises are comic by reason of their absurdity, the lines he has put into the mouths of the gentle murderesses are as wildly incongruous as to raise real shouts of mirth.

You realize at once, of course, that you have to deal with a batty family, perhaps the result of generations of inbreeding and a highly restricted Brooklyn life. There is a young man who fancies he is Teddy Roosevelt, who regards the staircase as San Juan Hill, who issues protocols and army orders and digs a Panama Canal in the cellar. This canal provides an excellent repository for the bodies of his aunts' victims who, he is assured, have

died of yellow fever.

It should be explained, too, that the aunts are really nice, generous, whole-souled and very reverent spinsters, and they are actually disposing of their boarders on the benign theory that the poor people would be better off in the cellar.

This situation might have gone on until half of Brooklyn was under the house if it had not been for the chance discovery of a nephew, of the eccentric proceedings, and by the arrival of another nephew—Mr. Karloff—who also had a body to dispose of, and who chose his aunts' cellar as a proper resting place for it.

So, altogether, it is a lovely murder play, and I think it is made to sound even better than it is by the superlative acting of Josephine Hull and Jean Adair as the lethal old pair, of Mr. Karloff as the maniac nephew, of John Alexander as the man, who thought he was T. R., and of Edgar Stehlé as a plastic surgeon who now and then was called upon to lift Mr. Karloff's face and make it even more horrible.

Miss Hull continues to make excellent use of her fluttery innocence and her affectation of sweet gentility, and her polite dismay at finding the corpse of an unknown gentleman in the windowbox where she thought she had deposited a Mr. Hoskins, was a masterpiece of comedy. Miss Adair is so disarming and philanthropic in her pouring of the poisoned wine that it would be a boorish man who would refuse one so gentle.

Mr. Karloff's acting had more restraint than I had considered possible in light of the long series of film horrors he has conducted, and I thought him excellent in every respect. Ailyn Joslyn as the sane nephew (who was finally discovered to be no nephew at all) played enthusiastically, and Miss Helen Brooks was helpful as the minister's daughter who nearly joined the still, silent company in the cellar.

Anyone who is fond of the macabre will sit with ghouliah glee through this one.

"Night of Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 3, 1941

'Night of Love' Has Premiere at Hudson

Musical Version of 'Tonight or Never' Presents Helen Gleason
as 'Frigid' Diva, Thawed by Romance

By JOHN ANDERSON

IN WHAT turned out to be his farewell gesture to the theatre the eminent Belasco presented at his namesake playhouse some ten years ago a slightly smothering item from the Hungarian of Lili Hatvany called "Tonight or Never," in which Helen Gahagan played a frigid opera singer who thawed out marvelously after one night of love and became quite a celebrated thrush.

It was, I suppose, only a matter of time before someone was bound to prod around in the plot and set its fragments to music and the result appeared at the Hudson last night as a musical play, produced by the Messrs. Shubert, and called with admirable accuracy, "Night of Love."

It seemed to me it hadn't improved much either with music or with age, and while this may be the wrong point to complain about, the new show still bears an aggravating resemblance to the original.

This fact, of course, will not bother the customers who kept the play running for months and who rejoiced to see the cool, marble-like Miss Gahagan loosen up after her night out and burst into rapturous womanhood and a brilliant career with a passionate high C, full of the 1930 equivalent of oomph. The transformation was so astonishing that everyone went around saying that sex is surely wonderful.

Four-Alarm Fire

Somehow I can't help feeling that this distinction is lost with Helen Gleason in

the role of the operatic star for in the first two acts Miss Gleason seems approximately as cold and restrained and unawakened as a four-alarm fire.

After the night of love it turns into a five-alarm fire, which is a difference of quantity and not quality. If the play doesn't begin in the refrigerator and end in the oven it's no story.

Otherwise the old plot moves along with the careful stickiness of a taffy pull, and Robert Stolz interrupts its movement now and then to insert such songs as "My Loved One," "I'm Thinking of Love," "The One Man I Need," "Serenade for You," and of course the mate cry of the title "Tonight or Never."

You may be interested to know that they

'NIGHT OF LOVE'

A musical play in three acts; adapted by Rowland Leigh from a play by Lili Hatvany; lyrics by Mr. Leigh; music by Robert Stolz; settings by Watson Barratt; costumes by Ernest Schrage; staged by Barrie O'Daniels; presented at the Hudson Theatre on January 7, 1941, by the Messrs. Shubert. The cast:
Cleó de Francine Dorothy Sargent
Madi Linden Martha Errolle
Rubero Frank Hornaday
Rudig Harrison Dowd
Call Boy George Spelvin
Count Albert de Grönac Robert Chisholm
Nella Vago Helen Gleason
Andor Jack Blair
Lisel Melissa Mason
Marchesa Sangiovanni Marguerite Namara
The Young Man John Lodge
Tilly Jann Moore
Walter Noel Cravat

are loudly and unanimously in favor of love, and that all of them sound exactly like the sort of music such a plot should have.

The singer's chauffeur, played by Jack Blair, and her maid, played by Melissa Mason, further interrupt the amorous proceedings with a couple of dances. Harrison Dowd gets the few laughs of the evening as the accompanist, the part played brilliantly for Belasco by Ferdinand Gottschalk.

The young lover, whose identity seems a secret to everybody except the audience, and whose wooing on the night of love changed the singer's career and tempted her to turn "Traviata" into boogie-woogie, is played pleasantly and with assurance by John Lodge, in his first New York stage appearance. Margaret Namara lends a further touch of distinction as a great diva of a bygone time—no small achievement with some of the lines she has to speak.

A hotel waiter in one scene summed up the general situation.

"Things are gay," he said in just the right tone of deferential regret, "in the main dining room."

I'll bet even the lobby had its advantages.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 8, 1941

"Night of Love" Goes Back to Day of Bad Books, Better Scores

"Night of Love," comedy with music adapted from the Hungarian by Rowland Leigh; music by Robert Stolz. Produced by the Messrs. Shubert at the Hudson Theatre, New York, Jan. 7, 1941.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

AS AN evening's entertainment I would say "Night of Love" at the Hudson is definitely on the weak side. It is obviously dated in the matter of story and staging. The score, by a newcomer named Robert Stolz, lifts it from time to time but only momentarily.

Rather regrettable, because the Messrs. Shubert have been generous in selecting the cast. There are several exceptional voices. Helen Gleason, who has had Metropolitan ambitions and acknowledgments, is a heroine. Marguerite Namara, a popular prima donna in her own right some years ago, comes back to try to breathe life into a character role. Martha Errolle, another good soprano, makes her Broadway debut with justified confidence.

John Lodge, of the Massachusetts Lodges, plays heroically, and Robert Chisholm is, as usual, a sort of baritone anchor man, making as much of little as a confident actor can.

But the material is not there, and the types

are mostly false. The quickest way to strange interest in a stage story is to force the heroine into self-pity or self-praise, to pose the hero seriously as a great lover, to propel hero and heroine into exaggerated, silly and palpably strained situations.

When Helen Gahagan and Melvyn Douglas played this same story as "Tonight or Never," back in 1930, it was a better straight comedy than it is a comedy with music. Then the popularity of its stars carried it through 232 performances.

Even had its present players a similar personal appeal the constant breaking in of the musical numbers would prove a handicap difficult to overcome.

Rival Songbirds

The story is that of rival prima donnas seeking the favor of their manager. One is beautiful but cold, the other warmer but less appealing. The cold one boldly seeks romance and is triumphantly, even a little startlingly, remade over night. She comes back to the opera swinging, not only "Traviata," but her torso as well. And what she threatens to do to Wagner is not at all in Miss Gleason's line. Miss Namara, too, is unhappily weighted with a line of dialogue inserted crudely to make her a brazen person, which she is plainly at difficulty in suggesting. Young Mr. Lodge is also self-conscious in his pose as a charmer of females. In fact no one in the cast seems altogether happy. Including a dance team, Melissa Mason and Jack Blair, lifted bodily out of the revue field.

The audience last night was royal to the singers, but apparently depressed by the text.

"Night of Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 8, 1941

Night of Love Opens, Modern Gags Injected

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Baroness Lili Hatvany's play Tonight Or Never, which you will remember as the story of an opera star who never had much of a voice, until she found romance in the arms of a man who, by a freak of fate, turned out to be an American impresario, has been done over into a musical comedy, so to speak, by Rowland Leigh (lyrics) and Robert Stolz (music).

The Messrs. Shubert have resurrected the script—and I was going to say some of the actors—from a storehouse that is fairly bulging with musical romances of this type and staged it at the Hudson Theater where it opened last night to a phlegmatic audience, under the title Night of Love.

It is, of course, possible that current events have had something to do with a changed attitude towards Continental romances we once found so gay and charming. Pretty little Viennese love stories, even when they are "modernized" by the injection of references to Wilkie buttons or Fiorello La Guardia, become either drab or inconsequential or both. And that, I think, has happened to the Baroness Hatvany's play.

Mr. Stolz's music is tuneful enough and fashioned to the light theme around which it is written. But it is reminiscent of the long chain of operettas that began about 1907 with the Merry Widow and that flourished until about 19 years ago when they surrendered to the briskness of the breathless, syncopated era. Mr. Stolz's theme song, I'm Thinking of Love, is nevertheless an attractive work, and

two of his ballads have pleasant melodies. Mr. Leigh's book follows the Hatvany theme conscientiously, despite the obviously artificial attempts to enliven it by the introduction of topical gags. But somehow the lines do not seem exceptionally bright or inspired. I might note that in a long scene when the prima donna was alone in the private dining room of a hotel and the waiter suggested that "madame might find it gay in the main dining room," there was some laughter from the audience—a form of critical comment, I believe.

The operetta was well sung but woodenly acted, the result, I believe of taking artists from the operatic field where yodeling is more important than gestures. Miss Helen Gleason, for example, sings the role of Nella Vago (Nelly Clancy), with a warm and powerful voice. She deserted the Metropolitan, according to the playbill, some three years ago in favor of light opera. She would, I think, be better suited to a Wagnerian role than to one calling for the vivacity of a love-hungry maiden.

The mannerisms, in fact, of most of the cast were as artificial as an acrobat's smile. An exception should be made in the case of John Lodge as the attractive lover. He has a pleasant personality, is graceful and acts with ease and assurance. Miss Martha Errolle, as Madi Linden, was also effective in most of her songs, and Marguerite Namara, deserved—and received—just applause for her pleasant contribution of several operatic classics. Watson Barratt's settings were, as always, attractive.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 8, 1941

'Night of Love,' a Musical Play, Opens at the Hudson Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"TONIGHT OR NEVER" was no great shakes as a play when it was produced some ten years ago by David Belasco, but it had the signal advantage of being sung and acted by Miss Helen Gahagan. "Tonight or Never" now has a great many more songs, is called "Night of Love" and does not have Miss Gahagan. With these extensive alterations it was reproduced last evening at the Hudson Theater.

Now it is a "musical play," occupying a kind of misty no-man's land between drama and operetta. The music is by Robert Stolz, who once had most of the country stirring to his "Two Hearts in Three-quarters Time" and can still write charming, romantic songs. A good many such songs are in "Night of Love"—"Without You," for example, and "I'm Thinking of Love." These, and the many others, are sung admirably by Helen Gleason, Marguerite Namara, Martha Errolle, Robert Chisholm and others. There

are also a couple of amusing grotesque dances by Melissa Mason and Jack Blair. And now at this point I seem to have run out of cheering news about "Night of Love." In spite of the music, there is still a lot of

play left and the drama of "Night of Love" is not a subject about which this correspondent finds himself at all cheerful.

The plot, originated by Lili Hatvany and now considerably fussed up by Rowland Leigh, has to do with an opera singer whose art lacks fire. Assured that love will remedy this deficiency, she spends a night with a handsome youth she believes to be a gigolo. Really he is, believe it or not, a scout for the Metropolitan. The lady thus acquires experience and a good job as pleasantly as possible and is enabled, further, to chuck out the Count Albert de Gronac, who in three years had not awakened her at all.

This is approximately the plot of "Tonight or Never" and not much of a plot at that. Gloomy efforts to insert modern humor have not helped much. About all that Mr. Leigh, as adapter, has achieved is rather arresting rapidity. This rapidity is almost gruesomely accentuated by the acting, which is the kind of acting very good singers perpetrate when they are at their worst. I am sure that Miss Gleason, Miss Errolle, Mr. Chisholm and most of the rest are at their worst in "Night of Love." John Lodge does not sing much, but acts as if he did. Miss Namara, on the other hand, is rather fun.

And they all sing nicely, which is something. Not enough for me, as it happens, but certainly something.

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," January 8, 1941

'Night of Love' Was Nice in 1912

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

YOU can like the ultra-modern *Pai Joey* or you can dislike it, but plainly it is having an effect on other musical comedies. They're all looking around now for that new twist, that touch of novelty, that extra something.

Take *Night of Love*, for example. Who could have foreseen any such musical a month ago? But from the moment the orchestra struck up a sort of 1912 overture, you knew that here was something you hadn't seen the like of for many a day. Not since 1912, in fact.

Say what you like, there was a great deal of culture and refinement in the plots they used in those days. In *Night of Love*, for example, most of the scenes are laid in a European opera house, and if you listen attentively you can hear *La Traviata* sung offstage.

Naturally there's more to it than just culture and refinement. There are, for example, two lady singers at the opera house,

and they fight over men and operatic roles with practically no refinement whatever.

There are some risqué bits also, involving one of the lady singers and a handsome young man who appears to be the gigolo of an aging marchesa. They have their *Night of*

Love together, and among other happy results, it does wonders for the lady's singing. As for the young man being the marchesa's gigolo, let me assure you that there's not a word of truth in it: he's her nephew.

This thoroughly outmoded tale was produced last night with some of the coyest and most twitery acting, some of the silliest dialogue, most broken-down witticisms and oddest direction that I have encountered in years. The music, by the man who once wrote *Zuei-Herzen* is *Drei-Pierel* *Talk*, is sometimes tuneful and always full of Schmaltz, but pretty routine stuff by comparison with Lehar and Oscar Strauss.

Helen Gleason and Martha Errolle, as the two divas, sang and sang, sometimes prettily and sometimes not. But for me it was Marguerite Namara, as the marchesa, who stole the show (no reward for its return). She too, it seems, had once been an opera singer, and the well-beloved of such gentlemen as the King of the Belgians and the Czar of Russia; and for old times sake she rendered airs from *Cornea* and *Moson*.

As she finished them, she stole numerous glances at the front box—under the impression, I suppose, that Edward VII. might be there. All I could make out, however, was a man who seemed to have fallen asleep.

"Night of Love"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 8, 1941

"Night of Love" Comes To the Hudson Theatre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

UNWILLING to let the dead past bury its dead, the Brothers Shubert turned resurrectionists last evening and, dragging "Tonight or Never" from the grave in which it has been lying, unwept, unhonored, and unsung these past ten years, tried to bring it back to life at the Hudson as a musical play known as "Night of Love."

Now life is one thing that Lili Hatvany's comedy never could claim even when, for some mysterious reason, it was visible hereabouts ten years back for 232 performances with Helen Gahagan and Melvyn Douglas as its leading characters. Its tale of a foreign opera singer, whose singing is improved after she has had an affair with a scout from the Metropolitan Opera she has mistaken for a gigolo, was more of a cadaver than a comedy even when Mr. Belasco first staged it at the theatre which still bears his name.

What the Shuberts have snatched from the theatrical beyond, and tried to revive as a drama with music, is, as one might expect, even deadlier now than it was a decade ago.

"De mortuis nil nisi bonum" ceases to make any sense when the dead forget they are dead, and, not content with haunting the living, pretend to belong in the land of the quick. Hence these unkind comments on so ghastly an attempt at gaiety and romance as "Night of Love."

But Why?

The "second chance" granted to Miss Hatvany's comedy has not been given to it with

much conviction. The settings by Watson Barratt seem more retrieved than designed. They are more Cain than able. The book, though brought up-to-date with indiscriminate references to Lucius Beebe and Hitler (Adolf) is a fossil of what even geologists would have to salute as the first water. And Robert Stolz's music, though noisy enough at moments to shake the rafters in the Romberg home and capably wheeled from the orchestra by Joseph Littau, comes across less as a sedative than as an interruption.

As for the cast, one can only feel pity. They face their duties as pallbearers with light hearts and chins up. Out of sheer sympathy, let nothing be said about those lesser ones who are downed by their burden. Helen Gleason forces one to look back fondly to the most interminable of Miss Gahagan's trilled "r's." Miss Gleason smiles violently, sings violently, and has violent fits of temperament all over the place as the script demands, but—neither before nor after her emancipation proclamation—is she what could be termed persuasive as the great diva.

To two people only is an audience indebted during the ordeal. One is Marguerite Namara, her agreeable singing and playing of that old throne-rocker, the worldly-wise Marchesa. The other is John Lodge, Mr. Lodge, who is given some awful things to say and do, and, not content with getting away with them surprisingly well. He is handsome, has a flair for comedy, has an excellent speaking voice, has lost all of his early stiffness as a movie actor, and appears behind the footlights not only as a man but as a gentleman, which is rarer still.

The evening, as a whole, however, is something that can be neither easily forgiven nor forgotten.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 8, 1941

Shuberts Turn 'Tonight or Never' Into 'Night of Love,' With Singers and Music

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH everything else in the world is changing with alarming rapidity, Shubert operetta remains standard. "Night of Love," which was put on at the Hudson last evening, follows the formula with great skill. There is something almost admirable about the exact proportioning of the tawdriness to the trifle. Against a Continental background of wickedness and high culture, an amour is accomplished with elephantine subtlety, and ladies and gentlemen in grand evening attire rush through dressing-rooms, restaurants and private apartments, talking of jewelry and rakish kings, drinking champagne, crushing extravagant tips into the hands of servile waiters and singing always at the top of their voices music that all sounds like a poorly orchestrated Viennese waltz.

"Night of Love" descends from the Lili

Hatvany "Tonight or Never" that David Belasco presented in 1939 with Helen Gahagan and Melvyn Douglas in the leading parts. It is the story of a Lucerne opera singer

who is about to be dispossessed from leading roles because her singing lacks fire and passion. In a fit of temperament she looks up a personable young man who has been haunting her at the stage door and the concert hall. After—see title—her singing acquires fire and passion, she becomes the sensation of Lucerne and the young man turns out to be a scout from the Metropolitan Opera House, which is always searching the world for new talent.

That is the story, and "Night of Love" sticks to it until after 11 o'clock. Some singers with trained voices have been engaged for leading parts—Helen Gleason, Marguerite Namara and Martha Errolle. Robert Chisholm plays the part of an incontinent count, and John Lodge, a personable Harvard man with good family connections, impersonates the Metropolitan's roving lover.

Although the talent is satisfactory and the voices obviously are superior to the score, the direction is undistinguished and every song is sung in calypso volume. Even in the old days before the great awakening the taste of Shubert operetta was not exalted. Although it is just the same as it used to be, including the awkwardness of the comedy, it seems worse because everything else has freshened. The Hudson stage seemed last evening to be crowded with ghosts who had not heard the cock crow a decade or more ago.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 8, 1941

Night of Dullness

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

A LITTLE musical dandy described as "Night of Love" has put itself on display at the long-suffering Hudson Theater, and the Messrs. Shubert boldly proclaim it as their own. In words of one syllable and some indistinguishable songs, it tells the story of how Miss Helen Gleason, an unaroused opera singer, was so excited by the embraces of John Lodge that she was immediately able to swing "Traviata" and secure an engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House. Based on a play of approximately a decade ago called "Tonight or Never," the new operetta, or whatever it is, gets new standards for dullness and ineptitude and makes one hope that the lives of the opera singers are not really as stupid as "Night of Love" insists that they are.

The theory that beautiful young actresses and singers cannot perform with the proper passion unless they succumb prettily to the

romantic advances of some dashing devil may make a good sales talk for the local wolves, but the evidence suggests that it is of no value as subject matter for the drama. At least "Night of Love," which proclaims this edifying artistic principle, was

no masterpiece as a straight play and it is many times worse than that as a musical show. The producers apparently think quite highly of their plot and they require three acts to set it down at its proper length, but, with or without music, the story they have to tell is incredibly tedious. And, unfortunately, the songs are nothing to revive one's drooping spirits.

Occasionally Miss Melissa Mason and Jack Bick enliven things for a moment with their dancing, and I found one sympathetic character in the person of Miss Martha Errolle, whose role as villainess requires her to look as vanquished and discomfited most of the time as I felt throughout the entire evening. Miss Helen Gleason is a coy heroine, and I couldn't notice that her romantic experience had changed her voice a great deal. There were moments, too, when it appeared that Miss Gleason saw through "Night of Love" and was boldly determined to burlesque it a bit. John Lodge, whose task it is to be the great romantic lover, gave evidence of being embarrassed at the nonsense he was called upon to perform, and I think we should all commend him for it. It is discouraging to find that the music is by the man who wrote "Two Hearts in Three-Quarter Time."

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 7, 1941

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday" Puts New Dress on an Old Model

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday," melodrama by Robert Wallsten and Mignon G. Eberhart. Produced by Luther Greene and James Struthers at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Jan. 6, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU will recognize a lot of old friends of the drama in "Eight o'Clock Tuesday" at Henry Miller's Theatre, where it opened last night, and you will probably be tremendously interested in seeing how smartly they have been fixed up for the meeting.

There is Ivan Godden, dead as a frozen mackerel when the curtain goes up, lying flat on the floor of his library. His young and pretty wife, many years his junior, is bending anxiously over him. His older and less attractive sister is hovering nervously in the background.

There are the next door neighbors, the Copleys, who are giving a dinner party and never suspect a thing. And Marcia Godden's younger and slightly alcoholic brother, who had tried to borrow money, both from the dead man and his sister.

There is the dead man's longtime friend, the family doctor, and the wife's lover, and the old-time family retainer who has served the Goddens, man and boy, for twenty-one years.

Plainclothes Dick

And finally there is a plainclothes dick, as we say in the shop, with psycho-analytical leanings, paired with another dick who, although he has learned to take off his hat in the house, doesn't have a lick of patience with

the new-fangled stuff. He's for the third degree when they won't talk.

But you will be surprised at the way these old-timers are treated by the authors, Robert Wallsten and Mignon Eberhart, who got the story from Miss Eberhart's novel "Fair Warning."

"Eight o'Clock Tuesday" is, you might say, "On Trial" without a revolving stage; a murder mystery that works backward by forcing the witnesses to illustrate their alibis, and finally exposes the party who dunit without the laying on of a single rubber hose and only one punch in the nose. The clumsy dick got the punch and took it.

Also it is done without mirrors. Just a liberal assortment of spotlights that pick out

the witnesses one at a time. Each of them starts relating what he was doing at 8 o'clock Tuesday. Then it is that the dead came to life, the absent reappear, and the air is filled with lies—both noble and silly.

Finally, however, the psycho-analyst in dick's clothing makes his point. Truth prevails, murder is revealed, unsuspected motives appear suddenly and the jig's up.

Up to Standard

As I have said before, the only demand made upon the who-killed-Cock-Robin drama by this department is that it shall be put together with sufficient skill, and peopled with characters of sufficient plausibility to make it interesting.

"Eight o'Clock Tuesday" meets this demand. Not too excitingly, but excitingly enough. It is splendidly acted by players who know their trade and are likewise personally attractive.

Pauline Lord is the star among them, and Miss Lord gives that old and ever fascinating portrait of the distraught lady suspected of having been up to no good and rather eager that you should believe the suspicions. She has had many imitators, but none of them has ever been as skillful as she at this business.

McKay Morris is the dead man who comes to life whenever needed and he, too, skillfully works the old fellow back from amiability to a viciousness that makes his passing quite satisfying.

Bramwell Fletcher is the "And what did you do then?" chap, and very good at it. Celeste Holm plays the unhappy wife with subtle art. Herbert Rudley, Margaret Douglass, Philip Tonge, James O'Rear, Clancy Cooper—all good, all helpful.

Nice setting by Lemuel Ayers, and competent direction by Producer Greene.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 7, 1941

Cock Robin

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

WHO stabbed McKay Morris, the brutal husband, as he sat in his darkened library one night, meditating further indignities for his pretty blonde wife?

If you are interested in the solution of this mysterious affair, possibly with the intention of rewarding the unknown benefactor for his or her public-spirited act, you can find out all about it in the new melodrama called "Eight O'Clock Tuesday." This is the Little Cock Robin affair run up by Robert Wallsten and Mignon G. Eberhart from a novel by the expert Miss Eberhart known as "Fair Warning." Although it is far too given to flashbacks for comfort and suffers from a desultory first act, "Eight O'Clock Tuesday" gathers the needed amount of pleasant suspense in its final section, and, since I firmly believe that even a fairly good mystery drama is better than no mystery drama at all, I found it diverting.

When the curtain rises on the murky proceedings in the Godden library, you find Mr. Morris, or Ivan Godden, as the authors insist on calling him, stretched out dead on the floor and his wife kneeling beside him in considerable panic. Actors representing suspects and detectives enter enigmatically and still Mr. Morris lies there, as sternly in state as if he were Julius Caesar, about to be the subject

of an oration by Marc Antony. There were those in the first-night audience who were of the opinion that Mr. Morris was giving his best performance as he remained on his back in solemn dignity, but for any one who might feel that this was too static a role for so dynamic an actor, I can say that Ivan Godden participates prominently in the activities at Henry Miller's Theatre, even if he is the corpse in the affair.

Least this lead you to the terrible suspicion that this is another ghost play, it is only fair to every one concerned to say that happily such is not the case. What happens is that the

dashing detective in charge of the matter is determined to make the suspects talk, and as they give their evidence, it is all revealed by the familiar flashback system, with the murdered Ivan Godden behaving more and more odiously as the plot proceeds. In the end, it all turns out to have been a rather commonplace sort of assassination, but despite the weariness inherent in the continued use of the flashback, the pursuit of the unknown benefactor, who did away with the evil husband, captures the sort of inescapable interest we detective story fans find in such things. Give us a murder to be investigated, a detective to ask the questions and a lot of assembled haters of the dead man to be grilled and I am afraid we are not so hard to please.

Rather a fancy cast has been gathered together in the interest of the current homicide. In addition to Mr. Morris, who can be very evil when he sets his mind to it, there are Miss Pauline Lord as the fluttery sister of the dead man, with a great secret locked up in her heart, and Miss Celeste Holm as the ill-treated wife and Cecil Humphreys as a doctor who will bear watching and Philip Tonge as the customary ominous butler. Bramwell Fletcher is the wise detective, who seems to have dropped over from Scotland Yard to help the American police, and Clancy Cooper is his hard-boiled assistant. Herbert Rudley is predestined to represent both suspicion and romantic interest and Miss Margaret Douglass is there for the comedy relief. All of them work admirably, and, although "Eight O'Clock Tuesday" is no masterpiece of crime detection, it will have to do until something better comes along.

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 7, 1941

'Eight o'Clock Tuesday,' a Murder Mystery, Opens at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MIGNON EBERHART is a scrupulous writer of murder mysteries, eschewing unknown poisons, murderous butlers, homicidal maniacs and such illegal elements. "Eight o'Clock Tuesday," which opened last evening at Henry Miller's and of which she is co-author, is marked by adherence to the rules. It is almost sternly legitimate. It is logical and it follows religiously all the best patterns. About all it lacks, indeed, is excitement.

Robert Wallsten and Miss Eberhart have fashioned "Eight o'Clock Tuesday" from the latter's novel, "Fair Warning." In both a domestic tyrant of peculiarly

displeasing habits is stabbed with one of those curiously sharp paper knives which are also so handy in old mansions and so much favored by murdering members of inbred families. Ivan Godden is dead in a heap when the curtain rises on "Eight o'Clock Tuesday." His wife, his sister, his wife's lover, a lady from next door, the family doctor and the butler quickly group around. Before the detective, who has contempt for ordinary police procedure, has more than started, the wife's brother staggers in, haggardly intoxicated.

It was one of these, as Inspector Wait quickly perceives. Inspector Wait inquires. Under his inquiry, all events immediately preceding the murder are re-enacted in

flash-backs. McKay Morris, who had looked like spending a relaxed evening on the floor as a corpse, obligingly gets up and takes part. Most of the events are acted out twice—first as the participants gloss over them; then as they really happened. In this way the truth is disclosed. It is all very sound. It is also, of course, entirely novelistic in method.

And that, I suspect, is the primary reason why "Eight o'Clock Tuesday" never achieves more than an academic interest. It is, in effect, a play made up entirely of those interrogation scenes which it is the anxious attempt of all mystery novelists to minimize. The reason mystery novelists, including Miss

'EIGHT O'CLOCK TUESDAY'

A play in two acts by Robert Wallsten and Mignon G. Eberhart; directed by Luther Greene; setting by Lemuel Ayers; presented at Henry Miller's Theater on January 6, 1941, by Mr. Greene and James Struthers. The cast:

Ivan Godden.....	McKay Morris
Marcia Godden.....	Celeste Holm
Beatrice Godden.....	Pauline Lord
Dr. Graham Blaikie.....	Cecil Humphreys
Robert Copley.....	Herbert Rudley
Verity Copley.....	Margaret Douglass
Ancil.....	Philip Tonge
Jacob Wait.....	Bramwell Fletcher
Davies.....	Clancy Cooper
Cassidy.....	Don Shelton
Gateway Trench.....	James O'Keefe

Eberhart, minimize them is that, although obviously necessary, they tend to be pretty dull. They are just about as dull, I am sorry to say, when acted out on the stage as when printed out on the page.

It is unfortunate also that in spite of the best efforts of competent actors, the characters remain without flavor. The murdered man, although obnoxious, is the liveliest of them all. Miss Pauline Lord is starred and plays one scene with her own great skill, but the character she portrays is only a Grade B suspect, seldom near the center of things. Mr. Morris is excellently vicious and every now and then, momentarily forgetting who he was, I found myself suspecting him like anything. Bramwell Fletcher is a gently reasonable detective and suspicious persons are properly acted by Celeste Holm, Margaret Douglass, Herbert Rudley and Philip Tonge. One of these did it. But I doubt whether, if you visit Henry Miller's, you will care very feverishly which.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 7, 1941

Eight o'Clock Tuesday Is Ingenious Mystery

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ALTHOUGH it follows the accepted pattern of all good detective mysteries, there is a certain ingenuity about Eight o'Clock Tuesday, the new play at Henry Miller's Theater, the details of the crime are so logically and relentlessly told and the enactment of it so skillfully and absorbingly done that it should prove eminently satisfactory to every addict of the whodunit drama.

In only one phase of the crime would I pick a quarrel with Robert Wallsten and Mignon G. Eberhart who wrote the play and that is in their final moment of weakness when they permitted the killer to escape trial by the familiar poison route. Surely, with the train of circumstances they so painstakingly laid, no jury would have convicted. Better to have brought down the curtain on the confession and permitted the audience to carry on from that point.

Rearranging the sequences of events as they occurred rather than as told by the authors, we find that some years before the curtain rises on the dead body of Ivan Godden (knifed through the heart) he had married his beautiful secretary and thereafter led her a life of hell. A cruel, sadistic, tyrannical husband, he had also, even before his marriage, inflicted countless humiliations and abuses on his sister, Beatrice. His ruthlessness had extended to breaking off Beatrice's love match with a certain Dr. Graham Blaikie. Thus we know at once that three persons at least could have killed him

cheerfully and with the utmost grace—Dr. Blaikie, Beatrice and young Mrs. Godden.

Next door, or actually separated only by a garden, stood the home of the Copleys, mother and son. It now appears that young Mr. Copley had been in love with Mrs. Godden since college days, and that he has constantly urged her to abandon the husband she hates and fears and run away with him. His mother heartily approves. And that adds two more to the list of potential murderers. Finally there is Mrs. Godden's brother, a ne'er-do-well who has tried unsuccessfully to borrow money from his brother-in-law, and the butler, who God knows, had ample reason to despise his master. That adds up to a total of seven minds with but a single thought.

Mr. Godden arrives home one Tuesday afternoon from the hospital where he has

been recovering—unfortunately—from an automobile accident. At eight o'clock that evening he is found murdered in the library, and the rising curtain discloses his wife bending over him and looking at the knife in bewilderment. Take it away from there, detective!

The authors ingeniously carry the suspects through one act in which, shielded from each other, they tell impossible lies to Detective Jacob Wait. Then in the second act they are forced to come clean, and we get the true facts about the unhappy situation in the Godden home. Less ingeniously they tell their story with flash-backs (commonly used in old-time movie sequences), and there are times when the device hampers the flow of the drama rather than speeding it. However, the actors give sufficient weight and talent to their parts to compensate in great measure for the creaking method, and there is a definite atmosphere of tension and suspense in the second act.

I don't know when a mystery play has been more wisely cast or better acted. First there is Miss Pauline Lord, whose impersonation of the nervous, wracked but guiltless Beatrice is beautifully accomplished. Miss Lord's facial expressions are more eloquent than the loudest voices of her colleagues. Bramwell Fletcher's performance of the detective was also one of extraordinary merit, persuasive, insinuating, intelligent. Celeste Holm, who is celestially beautiful, played the long-suffering wife gracefully and more substantially than some of her previous roles, and Cecil Humphreys gave his customary suave and polished performance of the doctor.

Despite an ending that, as I have indicated, seems weakened by suicide, Eight o'Clock Tuesday remains as the most absorbing mystery drama of several seasons.

P. S.: If you're thinking of Ladies in Retirement, I must point out that in that excellent play there was no mystery about who shoved the lady's body in the furnace.

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 7, 1941

Pauline Lord Seen in

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

MCKAY MORRIS was never more dead in his life than when the curtain went up at Henry Miller's Theatre last night. There he was stretched out on the floor of his shadowy suburban library with a paper knife thrust far into him, a man who had breathed his last, the mortal remains of Ivan Godden, a wretch who can be more accurately identified as Ivan the Terrible.

But did Mr. Morris stay put? He did not. Most assuredly, he did not. Things like that don't happen in the theatre, at least to such actors as Mr. Morris. Inspector Wait, in charge of the case, had his own notions as to how to solve the murder. Six—soon seven—suspects (each of whom had, of course, the best of motives for having done it) were assembled in the Godden library, waiting the Inspector's cross-examination in Robert Wallsten's and Mignon G. Eberhart's "Eight O'Clock Tuesday." But Inspector Wait was an original fellow. No finger prints or any of that routine stuff for him. He even had Mr. Morris's body removed from the room before the police photographers could go to work. It was after this, after his body had been carried safely into the wings, that Mr. Morris really got busy last night. And he was

kept busy until 10:45, running onto the stage in the dark, running off the stage in the dark, sitting first at his desk, next in his armchair, now standing at the door, then leaning against the fireplace, but always picked up (after scrambling into position) by a sunbeam of a spotlight as a figure, at first friendly, then sinister, and finally odious, who put in somewhat breathless appearances in flashbacks which were supposed to be conversational reconstructions of the events leading up to the crime.

Ivan the Terrible

No Equity member this winter has worked harder than Mr. Morris. Certainly in "Eight O'Clock Tuesday" he is a traveller who returns with wearying frequency from the bourne of that country in which he is discovered at curtain rise. There are several good actors to greet him whenever his physical presence is necessary to the alibis they are laboriously establishing.

Among these count Celeste Holm, the agreeable young player who is doomed to unhappiness as Ivan's wife. Then there is the ever-amusing Margaret Douglass as the flighty neighbor across the way. There is, too, the suave and handsome Cecil Humphreys, who is to be seen as the family neighbor. And Bramwell Fletcher, who knows his way about in such melodramas, is skillfully impersonating Inspector Wait, with an English accent that counts in this case as the only handicap. Above all, Pauline Lord is on hand to act the abused sister of the dead Ivan. Miss Lord can be a superb performer. She has her excellent moments even in "Eight O'Clock Tuesday." But, though it pains me to confess it, Miss Lord's mannerisms can be so unvarying that one not only tires of them but smiles at them as they were meant to be parodies of themselves.

Even such a cast cannot keep Mr. Wallsten's and Miss Eberhart's murder mystery from coming across as a very routine affair, lacking in suspense and more filled with yawns than tension. The truth—the whole truth—is a unconscionable time in coming out at the Henry Miller's. It becomes increasingly clear why the Inspector should have been named Wait. Waiting with him one tires of the whole feeble and unexciting business.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 7, 1941

Pauline Lord Associates With a Murderer in

a Mystery Called 'Eight o'Clock Tuesday'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that another murder has been done Pauline Lord has come out of intermittent retirement long enough to take her chances with the suspects. In "Eight o'Clock Tuesday," which was acted at Henry Miller's last evening, she is only one of several who might have plunged the paper knife into that foul beast. Whether she did or not is something that naturally cannot be revealed here, where mum's the word, paragraph and article.

But while she is demonstrating to the detectives how she did it—in case she did it—you have for a moment a flash of her genius. She is describing her movements in pantomime. In the interests of justice she forces herself into it, showing where she stood and what she did. Finally she comes to the point of simulating the crime. Suddenly the pantomime breaks down completely. It falls; it vanishes; the scene comes to a full stop and you can make up your mind whether or not she is acting the truth. As things go in the theatre, it is not an overwhelming scene

and it is not even the big moment in this Cock Robin drama. But it gives you in one crumpled gesture the whole structure of a character and it tooses an evanescent bit of greatness into a common crime show.

As a matter of fact, it is the only thing that really interests this playgoer in "Eight

o'Clock Tuesday." When the curtain rises on the detective drama by Robert Wallsten and Mignon G. Eberhart, the corpse is already on the floor. He is soon decently covered with a blanket, although you can see the blanket rise and fall, rise and fall with the regularity of breathing—always a nerve-wracking blemish in the acting of corpses.

Instead of turning things over to the rude ministrations of the police the authors surrender the mystery to a polished detective who works on the honor system. He intends to solve the crime by dragging a confession out of one of the ladies and gentlemen in the room. This involves a long series of flashbacks that compel the corpse to sneak back in the dark to wherever he was before they done him in. It also tediously breaks up the narrative and, until the second act, prevents the authors from developing interest in the characters and their love-life. Although the police want to find out who committed the murder, there is no reason why any one else should care very much.

The play has been directed by Luther Greene with the competence of stock-company performing. Bramwell Fletcher is the detective and McKay Morris the corpse. Cecil Humphreys, Margaret Douglass and Celeste Holm assist at the obsequies. They all do well whatever the play requires of them, and Miss Lord throws in a moment or two of genius for good measure. N. R.—After he feases up, the murderer takes fast poison. Quite a noble sight.

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," January 7, 1941

A Too Well-Bred Murder Mystery

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MY INSTINCT is to think highly of *Eight O'Clock Tuesday* because it's the only murder mystery I've ever doped out in my life. But I fear that's a point against it and merely proves that the solution was obvious rather than that I was smart. And I fear too that in spite of a skilful cast headed by Pauline Lord, the play is a bit on the slow and dullish side.

It begins briskly enough, with the discovery of the corpse. But unfortunately from there on we go backward instead of forward. It's flashback all the way. And unfortunately too, we flash back not to reconstruct the crime but to unearth the possible causes of it. There is a triangle story lurking, and it's like pulling teeth until all the details of it come out. It also takes a while to learn that the murdered man wasn't much fun to be around.

I found all this mildly boring. I like to get on from people's pasts to their alibis. I guess I even like the telltale five of spades

to be found stuffed down the sofa. And I'm not very fond of merely painstaking sleuths: they should be either dangerously dead pan or fiendishly sarcastic and brilliant. And what fun is it for the murderer simply to confess? The detective, just before the end, should unravel the whole thing with frightening lucidity and then say quietly: "Isn't that just about how it happened—Mr. Gibbs-Trevelyan?"

No doubt the authors of *Eight O'Clock Tuesday* were deliberately trying to get away from all that, and provide a well-bred, plausible murder mystery, but I'm afraid it's too well-bred for murder and too plausible for mystery.

Even in a not very large or rewarding role, Miss Lord again proved herself one of the most interesting, evocative and finished actresses in the theatre. Bramwell Fletcher performed neatly as The Gentleman from Headquarters, Philip Tonge suavely as The Irreproachable Butler, Cecil Humphreys urbanely as The Family Physician, Margaret Douglass brightly as The Niece. Miss Lord. And though a corpse at rise of curtain, McKay Morris—thanks to the flashbacks—managed to keep rising from the dead and be abundantly menacing.

"Eight O'Clock Tuesday"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 7, 1941

'8 O'Clock Tuesday' Presented at Miller's

**Murder in Library, Followed by Usual 'Whodunit?' Hunt, Has
Excellent Cast, with Pauline Lord at Its Head**

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS THE CURTAIN went up on "Eight o'Clock Tuesday" at Henry Miller's Theatre last night there was poor Ivan Godden lying abast the footlights, groaning his final groan in his sumptuous library, his beautiful young wife kneeling over him and, bless my heart! a paper knife, of all things, protruding fatally from among his ribs.

It took smart Inspector Wait two hours to figure it all out but I was convinced long before then that poor Ivan had merely been opened by mistake.

There is an old theory that an audience can never be interested in the murder of a character it hasn't met and the author obliges us in this instance with a tricky post mortem introduction.

As poor dead Ivan, McKay Morris is lugged off the stage, but when Inspector Wait begins to worm the true facts out of the household he returns and takes part in the incidents as they are repeated—an obliging actorplasm, more here than hereafter.

It is this tricky business of reenacting the stories of the murder, first as falsehood, then as partial truth, and then as the whole truth that the new play relies upon to sustain interest. Mr. Morris pops in and out to take his base while the clever inspector

tosses the usual clues aside and concentrates on motive and opportunity.

It would be a good trick if the authors could do it, but the device becomes monotonous and finally a little ridiculous. The play never achieves the necessary atmosphere of suspense and mystery because its method, I suspect, is essentially anti-theatrical.

Stage in Darkness

What it was like in Mignon Eberhart's detective story, "Fair Warning," on which she and Robert Wallsten have based the play I do not know. But it must have been simpler

and more credible than on the stage where the whole scene is plunged into darkness every few minutes so that poor Ivan can bring himself back alive.

You may be interested to know, perhaps, that Inspector Wait found a stageful of motives before the clock crept slowly around towards eleven. There was Mrs. Ivan right there as the curtain went up, with her story of an unhappy marriage and her youthful lover just next door, across the garden path.

There was Ivan's sister, with years of tyranny and repression to get even (in fact to get Ivan) for. There was the wife's scape-grace brother and the amiable family doctor and the butler who knew everything except enough.

Inspector Wait grills them modestly and gets them slowly but surely to tell on one another and on themselves. At the end we know who killed poor Ivan, even if we no longer care, and the one bright promise of the evening is the inspector's assurance, at the very end, that, hereafter, he's going back to the old methods of clues and fingerprints and who was that alibi I saw you with at four minutes past whatyoumaycallit.

The Messrs. Greene and Struthers have given the play a very handsome production and Lemuel Ayres has provided the perfect stage library as the sort of place where a person goes not to read a book, but to get a paper knife in his ribs.

The excellent cast is headed by Pauline Lord, as Ivan's somewhat vague sister, and she plays it with the usual nebulous mannerisms, half-sentences, odd pauses and jerky nervousness which can be so deeply affecting when she has a part charged with the necessary emotions, but which seem empty and overdone on the minor errands of such chaptrap.

With an unerring sense of comedy Margaret Douglass gets what amusement there is in a part too skimpy to let her warm up, and Bramwell Fletcher as the somewhat unusual detective, helps hold the story together by an energetic performance. There are other admirable performances by Cecil Humphreys, Herbert Rudley, Mr. Morris, and Celeste Holm, but somehow there just doesn't seem to be play enough to go around.

"First Stop to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 6, 1941

'First Stop to Heaven,' a Foolish One, Opens at the Windsor

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A NUMBER of intolerably quaint people performed strange antics last evening at the Windsor Theater. Mail carriers quoted poetry, policemen distractedly wished themselves back in Central Park and a building inspector, frenzied at finding himself in so odd a gathering, twice fell down a flight of stairs. This department shared the inspector's emotions, but was denied his release.

These things, and others too foolish to mention, occur in a comedy called "First Stop to Heaven," and written by Norman Rosten. Mr. Rosten is a poet who may have been reading William Saroyan, always an activity fraught with dangers and one particularly perilous for a poet. There is a haunting echo of Saroyan in "First Stop to Heaven"—a distinct echo which somehow makes the whole pathetic business seem faintly like an unintended parody. We get further, I feel, when Mr. Saroyan is allowed to parody himself.

Certainly we could hardly have got less

than we get in "First Stop to Heaven," which pictures a group of dull zanies in a Sixth avenue rooming house. A boy and a girl are present and fall in love, a minor gangster is really good at heart, a motherly landlady nurtures young love and in the end the city, for reasons known only to Mr.

'FIRST STOP TO HEAVEN'

A comedy in three acts, by Norman Rosten; staged by Robert Henderson; designed by Louis Kennell; presented at the Windsor Theater on January 6, 1941, by Margaret Hewes. The cast:

Eva Golden	 Allison Skipworth
Carl Golden	 Taylor Holmes
Mailman	 Willard Cary
Checkers	 Stanley Ackerman
KK	 Frank Maxwell
Ruth	 Elena Ryerson
Borgman	 Edward Frans
Richard	 Erik Wals
Tony	 William Chaltee
Mrs. Parsons	 Frances Brandt
Building Inspector	 James Bell
Alter	 Joe E. Marks
Salesman	 Douglas Rowland
Policeman	 Robert K. Adams
Jerry	 James Hayes
Mike	 Edward Jurist

Rosten, decides to dynamite the house. These ingredients, as mixed by Mr. Rosten, make a comedy which is almost incredibly silly.

The cast includes such stalwarts as Allison Skipworth and Taylor Holmes, neither of whom, to put it bluntly, is very good. James Bell and Joe E. Marks are merely unfortunate, deserving far better than they have received. I wouldn't wish "First Stop to Heaven" on the other members of the cast, either. I wouldn't wish it on anybody.

"First Stop to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 6, 1941

New Comedy at the Windsor Does Not Make Much Sense

"First Stop to Heaven," comedy by Norman Rosten. Produced by Margaret Hewes at the Windsor Theatre, New York, Jan. 5, 1941.

★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE new comedy at the Windsor is called "First Stop to Heaven." Why, I wouldn't know. It was written by a young man who earned good marks in college named Norman Rosten, and produced last night by Margaret Hewes with a cast containing several well known actors.

It is aimed, I assume, at the cut-rate trade, having been introduced at a \$2.75 top. Otherwise there would be little excuse for it. It seemed to me to be an aimless, plotless, witless affair vaguely concerned with the adventure of a simple lady who ran a Sixth Avenue rooming house she was trying to save from the hands of the wreckers after it had been condemned by the Building Department.

First she thought to convince the authorities that it was not a rooming house, but a one-family dwelling. To do this she called her assorted roomers into the livingroom and introduced them as one happy family. The suggestion doubtless had social significance.

This ruse gaining nothing, she stole the dynamite with which the blasters were about to blow up her roomers and herself and

thus protected a pair of honeymooners on the third floor.

Finally she accepted the inevitable, gave back the dynamite, and was apparently headed for New Jersey and what a minor gangster in the cast hailed hopefully as the poultry racket.

Surprisingly the cast includes such names as James Bell, Taylor Holmes and Allison Skipworth. They did what they could for Mr. Rosten and Miss Hewes. The support included Erik Walz and William Challee.

Reprinted from

NEW YORK TIMES

January 6, 1941

Violation

THE Golden's rooming house on Sixth Avenue appeared tenanted by the furies. There was Ma Golden, who ran the joint, and Ruth, who was a nurse and should have been in love, and finally was in love. There was Tony, a gunman, and a building inspector, and Richard, a writer for the pulps who acted more like a Harvard man. Alternately they all clasped frenzied brows, spake purple passages and nibbled on the scenery of what was "First Stop to Heaven" and what was also one of the more curious episodes of the theatre season of this year, or last.

Norman Rosten, whose play it is, tells of a roominghouse keeper who wants to see the girl marry the boy, not the gunman. That is plot A. Plot B (comic) is of a building inspector who is trying to legalize violations, who finally wins over, when the building is condemned for the new subway. Into various parts Margaret Hewes, the producer, has thumbed such people as Allison Skipworth, Taylor Holmes and James Bell, with Robert Henderson to direct them through the evening's mazes. Possibly three-quarters to two-thirds of the orchestra floor stayed for the last act—District Attorney Dewey among them—which was pretty friendly.

L. N.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 6, 1941

First Stop to Heaven Opens at the Windsor

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

MARGARET HEWES produced a new play at the Windsor Theater last night. It was called First Stop to Heaven.

Norman Rosten, who has written some nice poetry and an earlier play that won him a scholarship at the University of Michigan Drama School was the author. Robert Henderson directed, and the setting was designed by Louis Kennel.

Mr. Rosten's scholarship at Michigan seems to have been less fruitful than one might wish. Mr. Henderson's direction was frantic. Mr. Kennel's setting, a boarding house living room, was uninspired. Miss Hewes seems strangely to have lured an outstanding group of name players into Mr.

Rosten's nonsensical mare's nest. Among them are Allison Skipworth, Taylor Holmes and James Bell. All of them struggled valiantly in a cause that was lost before the first act was half over.

First Stop to Heaven purports to be a segment of life in a Sixth Ave. boarding house. It has in it young and timid love, a bold and dirty gangster, two hooligans who

throw stench bombs, an hysterical building inspector, a curbstome peddler, an old lady who sells Social Justice and a violinist with long hair.

The plot, if any, is concerned with the gangster's attempt to snatch the nice young girl from her nice young fiance's arms.

My heart bleeds for Miss Skipworth and the Messrs. Holmes and Bell. It bleeds even more copiously for the public.

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NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM."

January 6, 1941

Last Stop . . . All Out!

I'M NOT quite sure which is more baffling: Why *First Stop to Heaven* was ever produced in the first place, or now that it's indubitably here, what in creation it's all about.

A young gentleman named Norman Rosten wrote it, and he gives us what I believe is called a "slice of life" as it appears in a furnished room house over the Sixth Avenue subway.

Mr. Rosten puts as had an imitation as possible of Odets dialogue into the mouths of characters who are twelfth rate Saroyan. The result is that you find a bunch of thwarted unhappy people proclaiming, *First Stop to Heaven* knows why, that life is wonderful.—ROBERT RICE.

"First Stop to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 6, 1941

"First Stop to Heaven"

Produced at the Windsor

By WILELLA WALDORF

MARGARET HEWES presented at the Windsor Theatre last night a play, described as a comedy, by Norman Rosten, entitled "First Stop to Heaven." Why it is called "First Stop to Heaven" we can't imagine and whatever made Margaret Hewes produce it is an even deeper mystery. We began to fear the worst early in the evening when Allison Skipworth began a long speech to the ingenue with "Love is like a snowball . . ." When the postman came in quoting "Julius Caesar" and went out misquoting "Macbeth" there was no longer any doubt that all of us were in for something pretty trying.

"First Stop to Heaven" is laid in a rooming house on Sixth Ave. while the subway is being built below. Horrible noises come up from the cellar now and then but not, unfortunately, loud enough or frequent enough to drown out the dialogue. Taylor Holmes and Miss Skipworth, playing Mr.

and Mrs. Golden, are running the rooming house because Mr. Golden does no work beyond collecting stamps and sitting on the beach at Coney Island meditating on the state of the universe. Mr. Golden, in fact, wants to sell the house and return to the

country and raise chickens, so he tips off the Building Department that Mrs. Golden is violating all sorts of city ordinances by operating a rooming house in a two-family establishment.

The Building Inspector, oddly enough, was James Bell, who kept falling down the cellar stairs and generally taking his job very, very seriously. Mrs. Golden, spurred on by some of her more amazing roomers, decided to circumvent the Building Department by turning the household into one big happy family. The idea didn't seem to work out very well.

If all this sounds pointless, so did the play. It is one of those comedies you'd swear must have been written by the actors as they went along except that if such were actually the case, it would probably have made more sense. Some of the players spoke their lines when other players were speaking theirs, but it didn't matter in the least. Joe E. Marks as a little fellow who sold razor blades and believed in the Brotherhood of Man made some of the audience laugh now and then. The audience, a genuine first-night gathering, included Hope Hampton and District Attorney Dewey.

District Attorney Dewey, in fact, was still there when this department left. At the end of the second act Mr. Bell marched in and told everybody the house was going to be blown up at midnight. We wanted to get out in plenty of time. What the third act was about we don't know and doubt very much if anybody who stayed for it does either.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 6, 1941

Nonesuch

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MY GUESS is that Norman Rosten, the author of "First Stop to Heaven," was scared by William Saroyan at a very early age. Possibly, though, he is merely one of those intense Saroyan-haters, grimly determined to make fun of the hermit from Fresno even at the cost of his own reputation. Anyway, the new play at the Windsor Theater is the sort of thing that the man who wrote "The Time of Your Life" and "Love's Old Sweet Song" might have set down if he were ten or twelve times less talented than even his wildest detractors pretend to think that he is. I imagine that Mr. Rosten doesn't think much of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, either. For "First Stop to Heaven" is as cruel a burlesque of "You Can't Take It With You" as it is of Saroyan.

It seems to be the theory of the new play that all you have to do to write a gay and original comedy is to toss into the cast a lot of eccentricities of one kind and another and let them talk with a trace of amiable mad-

ness. "First Stop to Heaven" is conclusive proof that the trick is far more complicated than that. The characters who invade Eva Golden's boarding house in Sixth Avenue are strangely enough assorted and they talk elliptically enough, but the trouble is that they are dull and foolish and their dialogue is vapid, dismal and aimless. Mr. Rosten, I believe, is a young poet of promise, but, if this vagrant comedy of his is any test, he certainly has a scant gift for the drama.

A number of actors, hitherto comparatively blameless, dart about pointlessly, signifying nothing. Miss Allison Skipworth is the boarding-house keeper, who wants her boarders, or whatever they are, to be one happy family. Taylor Holmes is her husband, who wants to go back to the farm. James Bell is a building inspector with the sound idea of dynamiting the whole house. They and their colleagues are handicapped not only by furiously ineffective writing but by highly tentative direction. Joe E. Marks as a talkative and presumably lovable fellow and Douglas Rowland as some sort of unenterprising salesman manage to create what almost amount to characters, but the whole enterprise is pathetically hopeless.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 6, 1941

'1st Stop to Heaven'

Staged at Windsor

Alison Skipworth and Taylor Holmes Appear in Play Written by Scholarship Winner

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE three of my fellow critics once awarded Norman Rosten, the author of last night's play, a scholarship in drama, we may assume charitably that "First Stop to Heaven" is not a good sample of his work.

In the dingy and slovenly production Margaret Hewes has given it at the Windsor we may even assume that it is not as dreadful as it seems, but in spite of everything there is the simple fact that it is pretty bad. Retreating first nighters evidently found it the last stop to hell.

It sounds like Saroyan gone cock-eyed and re-writing with double talk all the New York rooming house plays you ever saw. It sprawls all over the stage and gets goofier and goofier from the opening moment, when the quinty-quant old postman comes in reciting Shakespeare, to the final scene, when the City of New York decides to blow up

the rooming house (too late to do me any good) and finds the landlady has the dynamite hidden in what the Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur used to call her buzzroom.

Pretty Peculiar

All of the characters who infest Mr. Rosten's cast are pretty peculiar, and one or two of them seemed just one twitch ahead of the straitjacket. There is a daffy old woman who goes around putting copies of Social Justice in everybody's pocket, and a timid man from the building inspector's office who in spite of his nervousness, orders the building vacated and blown up on four hours' notice, as if it were no more than a toy balloon.

A tinpot Italian gangster hires a couple of youngsters to throw a stink bomb and hit a little Jewish pitchman on the head, and a writer for the pulps vaguely wooks a young trained nurse, who wants to run away with the gangster instead.

One Happy Family

Perhaps all this rigmorale has some social significance in Mr. Rosten's mind, for in an attempt to keep the house the roomers pretend, for the benefit of the building inspector, that they are just one happy family.

It is this experiment in brotherly love that the Jew, who is the chief victim, calls the first stop to Heaven. But fix the symbolism any way you please, I still say it's fog, with a slight flavoring of sarsaparilla.

As an example of the sort of production Miss Hewes has given the script I may cite the fact that three of the play's four scenes take place at night, and that the eyecore room set is flooded magically with light when there isn't a lamp on the stage. The direction is equally improbable and mysterious, so I hold the cast generally innocent of the sort of behavior.

These new Sunday night shows seem bent on drying people back to their homes.

"The Lady Who Came to Stay"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 3, 1941

'The Lady Who Came to Stay' Brings a Ghost Story Into Maxine Elliott's Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THEY are doing the best they can to scare the innocent theatregoer at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. Using an old ghost story by R. E. Spencer as his source-book, Kenneth White has written a nightmare and Guthrie McClintic has directed and produced it as if he believed in it. If Mr. McClintic wants to remind us that Mady Christians is an actress of remarkable power and that Mildred Natwick is also extraordinary he is well within his rights and is giving his all for art.

But if he thinks that "The Lady Who Came to Stay" is worth all the hard work and skill that a good theatre production requires, this column will have to beg to be excused. It is a silly, maudlin piece of willful adolescence that seems especially mal à propos in the modern world. In the acting, directing and in Donald Oenslager's ingenious combustible setting there is enough talent in this production to revive "Desire Under the

Elms" or "Night's Lodging" or something worth respecting. . . .

The excellence of the acting makes this kind of wastefulness particularly annoying. Is there

no way of making an intelligent use of an actress like Miss Christians? Here she is cast as one of three queer sisters who live in a dismal house and behave as if they were feeble-minded. But Miss Christians, who was the queen in the Evans "Hamlet," plays the part as if it were tragedy. Gaunt, hard, frightened, doomed by fate, she moves through the play like a spirit possessed. Her voice has unusual range and volume, and she uses it magnificently. Although the part is ridiculous, she plays it as if it were a tragic character haunted by destiny. Her acting has stature and force.

Every one knows what Miss Natwick can do with any part that comes her way. As the weakest of these ghost-ridden sisters, she communicates the timidity and desperation of a human being caught in a web, and makes the character genuinely poignant. As the sister of cruelty, Evelyn Varden has a gratuitous part that is credible only to people who believe in witches. But Miss Varden is also an able actress. While she is frightening little children in this play, a theatregoer cannot be excommunicated for gratefully remembering the quiet beauty of her acting in "Our Town." Beth Merrill is another actress who can play a part when she gets it. She proved that about a year ago in a curious aberration euphemistically entitled "Christmas Eve."

Three or four other actors walk blamelessly through this hashy carnival, and Mr. Oenslager has designed a weird setting that suffers heavy damage from crackling fire and choking smoke in the last act. The spectacular fire is a good way to end "The Lady Who Came to Stay." But if it really consumes the leading actresses in Mr. White's ghost story, this column will never forgive Mr. McClintic.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, January 3, 1941

Premiere of 'Lady Who Came to Stay'

Ghostly Proceedings at Maxine Elliott's; Mildred Natwick, Mady Christians, Evelyn Varden in Cast

By JOHN ANDERSON

IT WAS, I believe, the Lady Margot Asquith who remarked that she didn't believe in ghosts because their appearance was all against them, and their appearance is pretty heavily against "The Lady Who Came to Stay," presented last night by Guthrie McClintic in Maxine Elliott's Theatre. It is a depressing and somewhat sadistic exercise in spook-a-boo drama by Kenneth White designed to induce shudders and chills. Instead it merely left me cold, so cold in fact, that the sleety street seemed a welcome relief.

Mr. White's play is based on a ghost story by R. E. Spencer and suggests vaguely Henry James' masterly "The Turn of the Screw." Here is a sinister and sunless New York mansion of the Victorian era inhabited by three inhibited spinsters, one, the youngest, sex-starved to despair, one coolly arrogant and cruel, and the eldest a flabby minor witch who spent all her time just hating and hating. Every now and then she would pop out from the dark to do a little fancy hating in what I suppose they called the hating-room and then pop back again to work up a fresh batch of venom.

They seemed to hate one another heartily and everybody else; but most of all they hated their dead brother's wife and daughter, who came to live with them.

You could get dear old Aunt Phoebe into a homicidal rage in two seconds flat merely by touching her knitting. She'd get pretty mad if anyone mentioned Spring, and she had fun tearing up flowers.

Well, into this dank collection of twisted old bats come the young girl and her mother and the first thing you know the mother dies, leaving the pretty young lady to stand it alone.

Mama Haunts 'Em

But not quite alone, for when the weird sisters have driven the girl to desperation the Mama Ghost begins to walk. She haunts them like all get out, playing the piano and sticking her head into the hating-room now and then with a green light on her face.

This makes old Aunt Phoebe madder than ever, so she attacks the ghost and gets herself smacked down. But at Maxine Elliott's when any character dies they just get a green light and keep right on with the conversation.

At this point the Mama Ghost and the Aunt Phoebe Ghost really go into the clinch

to see which can out-haunt the other. Aunt Millie, whose eyes by this time were out on sticks, went over to the girl's side and smuggled her out of the house to marry a young man. But then Aunt Emma, prompted by Aunt Phoebe (who must have been having quite a romp by this time) lured their nine-year-old nephew into the dim horror of the mansion and went to work on him. At this point the play, which had piled horror on horror until it had become a little silly, turned simply sickening. Aunt Emma takes the little boy up to her room and whips him until he is nearly dead in a scene that has approximately the charm and entertainment value of a torture chamber and a psychopathic ward.

But the boy is saved, Aunt Millie dies, or gets the green light, and then Aunt Emma tries to fight it out with all three of them. She winds up by burning the house down to kill herself and get rid of the whole nasty mess leaving, among the smouldering ruins, my regret that she didn't think of it at 9:15 instead of 11:10.

Fun in Ghost Stuff

Good ghost stuff is fair fun in the theatre, with all the spooky clatter of dim lights and doors swinging scarily open; but this goes so far that it turns silly, and then unpleasant. Instead of making the hair stand on end it will, I fear, merely make the playgoers stand on end and start home.

It seems a further pity that Mr. McClintic should waste his time and talent on such stuff, but he has produced it with his customary expertness.

As the youngest of three sisters Mildred Natwick is suitably terrified and repressed, and Mady Christians finds herself handicapped as Aunt Emma by writing that is confused and over-serious for a shudder-bazaar.

Evelyn Varden is so terrifying as Aunt Phoebe in a ghastly makeup that every time she came over to my side of the stage I hid under the seat and crossed my fingers.

Mrs. James Thornton is amusing as an elderly housemaid who seemed able to survive it all, and there are admirable performances by Beth Merrill, Augusta Dabney and Master Dickie Van Pattern.

Donald Oenslager's single setting is massively menacing and worthy of better spooking. It's haunted by a mess of ghosts, but not, I'm afraid, by the ghost of a show.

"The Lady Who Came to Stay"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 3, 1941

'The Lady Who Came to Stay,' Ghost Drama, Opens at Maxine Elliott's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PLAYS don't come much more horrendous than last evening's "The Lady Who Came to Stay," which opened shiveringly at Maxine Elliott's Theater. Sadism reigns rampant in its numerous scenes, complicated by mild sex mania and ghosts. Small boys scream in torment behind closed doors. Abandoned pianos play little tunes and antagonistic spirits confront one another and speak hollowly while they torture those unfortunate enough to be still alive.

All these things, thought up by Kenneth White on the basis of an earlier nightmare by R. E. Spencer, happen at the turn of the century. Before characters begin to drop like flies, three spinster sisters are living together in a monstrous house. One of them is mad already. Another is sex haunted and the third is, at the start, just sort of mean. She is as crazy as anybody by the end of the play, however. It is she, finally, who burns the house down, rightly feeling that the community will be a more wholesome place without it.

Before this happy ending the sisters have killed their brother's wife—just by scaring her to death, as I understand it. They have harried their handsome niece, but only driven her to the arms of a young man who wears glasses. Only because one of the furies enjoys a brief attack of sanity does their still younger nephew escape with nothing more

than a bad psychosis. About the only thing this trembling correspondent can say about "The Lady Who Came to Stay" is "Whew!" It is, to be sure, my suspicion that Mr. White and Guthrie McClintic, who directed and produced, intended rather more serious repercussions than I seem to have experienced. If a faint note of burlesque creeps into the play, chiefly because of the extreme lavishness of horror, it is presumably unintentional. It is with some feeling of guilt, therefore, that I report having been about as much amused as frightened. There is no accounting for scares. It just happens that too many ghosts, popping gloomily through too many doors, seems a little com-

'THE LADY WHO CAME TO STAY'

A play in seven scenes by Kenneth White, based on a ghost story by R. E. Spencer; designed by Donald Oenslager; directed by Guthrie McClintic and produced by Mr. McClintic at Maxine Elliott's Theater on January 2, 1941. The cast:

Katherine	Beth Merrill
Emma	Mady Christians
Sadie	Mrs. James Thornton
Milly	Mildred Natwick
Phoebe	Evelyn Varden
Ann	Augusta Dabney
Roy	Horton Heath
Roger	Dickie Van Patten
Doctor	Morton L. Stevens

cal to me—as long, of course, as they are safely on the stage and I am safely in an orchestra chair.

Certainly no one could ask for scarier acting than the cast provides. The usually un-frightening Evelyn Varden is a terror from first to last. Mady Christians is rigorous as the sanest sister and Mildred Natwick does a really remarkable job as the evilly twittering one. Beth Merrill, as a nicer ghost, and Augusta Dabney and Dickie Van Patten as the threatened youngsters are also able. My favorite character was played with rare tranquillity by Mrs. James Thornton. Ms. Thornton, playing a singularly imperturbable maid, is allowed to sum things up. With ghosts and madness all around her she twists her apron and, with quiet interest, remarks conversationally: "This is a house."

Long after I have recovered from the mild fright engendered by "The Lady Who Came to Stay" I expect to remember this remark. It is, surely, one of the supreme understatements of dramatic literature.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 3, 1941

Mr. McClintic Stages "The Lady Who Came to Stay"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"THE owly-hoots are out tonight," says Mrs. Tuddlewinks in the nursery rhyme. And so they were—in droves—at the Maxine Elliott last night. For there Guthrie McClintic was presenting a ghost-ridden melodrama by Kenneth White, called "The Lady Who Came to Stay," in which the three weirdest sisters known to the drama since "Macbeth," died off one by one and, by refusing to stay put, kept more than their graves yawning for the major portion of a silly evening.

Mr. White's play is based upon a novel by R. E. Spencer which only yesterday, in a letter to Miss Waldorf published on this page, Mr. Spencer admitted was written under the influence of "The Turn of the Screw." How worthy of the Henry James tradition Mr. Spencer's novel is when read, I do not know. But I do know that the spook sonata Mr. White has made from it leaves much to be desired, and nothing more so than the permanent interment of the three sisters who haunt it.

The trouble with ghost plays is their ghosts. In fiction they can remain sights unseen—at least by the reader. The imagination stirred by print is free to do the full horrendous work. Only the mind can see, and seeing creates goose-flesh. The theatergoer is not so fortunate. A mournful difference exists between goose-flesh experienced in the library and actual ghost-flesh encountered on the stage. "The Lady Who Came to Stay" makes this clear—at once distressingly and laughably clear. It starts off in a shadowy old room, filled with ominous stairs, alcoves, doors, and Victorian fixtures which, as designed by Donald Oenslager, any modern ghost out of his

right body would take to as naturally as Elizabethan shades took to a cauldron.

Ghost Ridden

For the first half hour or so everything is as disturbing as things should be in this kind of hocus-pocus. In reality things are too disturbing to be kept on at such a pitch. Still they do their fearsome damage. Then the sister-in-law, hated by the three Graymal-kins, dies. And things get better, when as a former concert performer, her spirit takes to playing a piano off-stage. Things shudder up still more when the first of the sisters finds death no longer in a holiday mood, and she begins to slide unseen through doors that open and shut mysteriously.

Soon thereafter Mr. McClintic makes the fatal mistake of bringing his ever-ceasing shades on stage. To be sure, Moll Flanders is not among them, as she was in Mr. Rice's

"American Landscape." Even so, they finally seem in convention met. Of course, they appear under spotlights. Because a spotlight is the inevitable ally of all onstage dead people who are possessed of the wanderlust. But with the moonbeam released by the first spotlight and the physical appearance of the first ghost, excitement vanishes, illusion fades, and what promises to be spooky encounter to satisfy a spiritualist becomes a laughable fraud that it takes no Houdini to expose.

After the dead people begin to go on walking tours in "The Lady Who Came to Stay," with the most unerie effect that has been seen hereabouts since the elder Hamlet used to put on fishnets to stalk the ramparts in Robert B. Mantell's production of "Hamlet," the living come in for some pretty shabby handling. The dead sister-in-law's grown daughter and little boy are fought over by both the quick and the dead, and maltreated in ways which are fairly hard to take. So is the audience. And so throughout the evening is old Sadie, that dear, long-suffering, and amenable house-maid who, if only she could be manufactured wholesale, would solve the servant problem.

Empty Graves

Mr. McClintic has staged "The Lady Who Came to Stay" exactly as if he believed in it. He has brought together such capable actresses as Beth Merrill, Mady Christians, Mildred Natwick, and Evelyn Varden to people Mr. Oenslager's frightening setting. Although one feels sorry for Miss Christians for having to suck and say "boo" at such a fearful rate all night, and pitie Miss Natwick for the unpleasantness which is forced upon her, Miss Varden once again proves how fine an actress she is by her shuddery performance of the awful Phoebe.

The troubles with the evening are many and deep-seated. It starts off on a key which, since it cannot be capped, is soon bound to grow laughable. The writing is as cheap as it is improbable. And the script has neither the courage of its trashiness nor the intelligence with which to back up its psychological pretensions. I'm afraid "The Lady" at the Maxine Elliott has not come to stay. May she, and we, soon give up her ghosts.

"The Lady Who Came to Stay"

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," January 3, 1941

Lots of Horror But No Thrills

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I HAVE never read the novel from which last night's play was adapted, but I recall that when it appeared seven or eight years ago it was praised as a work in the Jamesian manner. It possesses certain remote resemblances to *The Turn of the Screw*, and conceivably in book form it evoked a vivid atmosphere of ghostly horror. But transferred to the stage, it becomes—as no doubt *The Turn of the Screw* itself would become—an extremely high-pitched and incoherent melodrama, never convincing, never exciting, and often just preposterous.

For this is none of your claptrap melodrama whose one object is to make your flesh creep. This is one of those excursions into the psychopathic and supernatural which either convulse your very soul or just go hopelessly to pieces—a sort of seizure or nothing. And the answer to *The Lady Who Came to Stay*, I'm afraid, is nothing. Its dread atmosphere, its warped minds, its clenched furies refuse to take recognizable form. Its ferce struggle of opposed forces for mastery refuses to achieve any meaning.

Three Sisters

The play deals with a House of Mental Polk—three sisters, one sex-starved, one insanely proud, one black with hate. The lady of the title is their brother's penniless widow, a life-loving woman who comes with her daughter for a visit. The black-souled sister wreaks all her hate upon her; then both of them die. They then haunt the house as spirits, symbols of love and hate and good

and evil, fighting to dominate the destiny of the living.

Most of the living, however, either die themselves, or go mad, or acquire imaginary companions, or commit arson—while the two ghosts keep wandering around in the dim light like people trying to find the bathroom in a country hotel. The sense of hysteria grows, the spectator's incredulity mounts, and each scene takes place at a more unconventional hour than the previous one.

Mr. McClintic has directed the play with all the stops out. Evelyn Varden as the haunted sister and Mady Christians as the proud one cannot avoid being theatrical; but at least they are effectively so. As the third sister Mildred Natwick has a bad part to struggle with, but somehow lacks her usual skill. Donald Oenslager's set gives you a graphic idea of what the play ought to be like but isn't.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 3, 1941

Ghost Story

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT MAY conceivably be significant that the first new play of 1941 should be a jolly little essay in morbidity. Horror, death and evil spirits frolic through the haunted spaces of "The Lady Who Came to Stay," and three weird sisters fight out their battle beyond the grave for the body and soul of an entirely harmless boy and girl. A dead mother plays the piano offstage, and many phantoms, including that of the late Henry James, put on their most sinister garb as the lights go up and down and doors open stealthily in one of Donald Oenslager's most ominous-looking mansions. The drama by Kenneth White, which is based on a novel by R. E. Spencer, is proudly and unashamedly a ghost story, without any mealy-mouthed attempt to pretend that it is anything else. It bows gravely to Mr. James's famous "The Turn of the Screw" and then goes on its way eerily.

Although "Hamlet" has never suffered from the fact that it proudly possessed a ghost in its cast of characters, almost every modern play with a phantom stalking about in it has been suspect to critics and playgoers. Usually, though, the modern ghosts have been extremely didactic fellows, bent on pointing a moral or preaching a sermon. The phantoms in the new play are out for different game. The first of them is a friendly haunt, handsomely determined to rescue her daughter from the bleak and musty house in which she is imprisoned. The next to arrive is a hateful old woman, combining all the worst features of the three crones in "Macbeth" and evilly set upon capturing the girl for her own demonic purposes. Then the daughter escapes and the fight goes grimly on for the dead mother's little son. It is touch and go for a while and then another sister joins the good ghosts and evil is vanquished, as the house of doom falls just as if it belonged to the Ushers.

It must be said for "The Lady Who Came to Stay" that its high emotional tension is maintained undaunted to the end of the play, and that its peridious material was rarely challenged by laughter in the first-night audience. Its morbid psychology seemed to me sometimes obscure and unappealing, but, on the whole, both ghosts and humans behave in a fashion which, granted their disagreeable

neuroses and particular forms of madness, is dramatically believable. Mr. McClintic, who produced, and directed the play, says that when he read it his hair stood on end, and there are scenes in the drama in which his emotional attitude toward his script is understandable. My own impression is that the Kenneth White work is somewhat overwrought and given to emotional extravagance, but that, for a stage ghost story, it is interesting and at moments emotionally striking. Ghosts have a way of losing their dramatic impressiveness on the stage, but here they do have a way about them.

The acting and the atmosphere are resourcefully sinister. Miss Evelyn Varden plays the most dangerous of the ghosts and manages to make the implacable phantom that hates ingenuities and children properly awesome. Miss Beth Merrill is correctly eerie but friendly as the sympathetic ghost, and it must be said on behalf of both actresses that they rarely made the battle between good and evil phantoms seem like a parody of the fight for the soul of Little Joe in "Cabin in the Sky." Miss Mady Christians is the haunted lady in whose soul another fight between heaven and hell is fought out, and she succeeds in being grimly impressive. Miss Mildred Natwick, as a wistful maiden lady with a nasty mind but good intentions, plays with her customary guile, and Miss Augusta Dabney is sympathetic and effective as the ghost-ridden daughter. Dickie Van Patten as the boy and the rest of the cast help out sensibly. "The Lady Who Came to Stay" is intense, psychological horror stuff that never quite becomes silly.

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Critics'

Theatre Reviews

"The Lady Who Came to Stay"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 3, 1941

"The Lady Who Came to Stay" Is Burned Out at Maxine Elliott's

"The Lady Who Came to Stay," drama by Kenneth White. Produced by Guthrie McClintic at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, Jan. 2, 1941.



By BURNS MANTLE

THE timing was bad at Maxine Elliott's Theatre last night. They burned the stage house down at the end of the play. It would have been better had they burned it down before the play started. Then there would have been no production of "The Lady Who Came to Stay," which would have saved us a disappointment and saved a favorite producer, Guthrie McClintic, a sizable cash investment.

Unfortunately, I call it, that Mr. McClintic should be celebrating his twenty-fifth anniversary as a producer, and his sixty-first job as a director, with "The Lady Who Came to Stay."

Not because it is a discreditable job, but because it is a wasted one. Or seems so to me. An exercise in sheer craftsmanship in the theatre that overlooks nothing in the way of technical skill and judgment in casting, but develops nothing that could reasonably appeal to an audience of paying numbers.

However, remember I am the lad who insisted that the grime and sordidness that came with "Tobacco Road" were the sort of stuff that made playgoers uncomfortable. They would not pay to see such stuff in the theatre, I said. And good old "T. R." is now in its eighth year.

But it was the laughs, the social significance and the sex overlay that tripped the protestors in "T. R." There is no comedy in "The Lady

Who Came to Stay" and no more than a touch of sex, and that a little nasty.

There is an evening of superior acting by what is practically an all-feminine cast. Those of you who are interested in the horror drama as such, and those of you who may have belittled the acting range of Evelyn Varden, Mady Christians, Mildred Natwick and Beth Merrill, will find interesting exhibits on view in Maxine Elliott's Theatre.

Otherwise "The Lady Who Came to Stay" is pretty depressing. Kenneth White whittled it from a ghost story by R. E. Spencer. It has to do with a haunted house and a haunted group of hateful persons.

It is a little as though the spirit and influence of the detestable brat of "The Children's Hour" had matured in Hell and, with the un-

happy schoolteachers who were her victims, had taken over the stage on which they scored tremendously a few seasons back.

Three miserable sisters, voluntarily imprisoned in a house of hate, are dominated by the oldest of the three. She is seeking to revenge the marriage of a dead brother by mistreating the actress wife and daughter he has left behind.

Confession

The persecuted one dies. So does the most hateful of the sisters. Thereafter they jointly haunt the house—one to carry on, the other to circumvent her diabolical plottings.

The daughter escapes, but her young brother replaces her, and is tortured in his turn. The study in horror and its invention is deliberate. Fascinating for a scene or two, as well staged horror plays frequently are. But after that just plain irritating, and frequently a little stupid.

The gray shades of the departed do not help. Without sympathy (such as carried "The Return of Peter Grimm," for example), stage ghosts are pretty hard to take, however expert the lighting.

And the lighting in this instance is expert, even though overdone. Never has there been so consistently dismal a house as this, I'm sure.

The setting is magnificent. Donald Oenslager built it, and it must have cost Mr. McClintic a goodly sum. One day I hope he will get a play to match this setting.

The Varden, Christians and Natwick studies are magnificently in the best tradition of stage horror drama. Augusta Dabney does well as the unhappy daughter and Dickie Van Patten as the young brother. A nice short part for Mrs. James Thornton, too, and another for Horton Heath.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 3, 1941

The Lady Who Came to Stay Fascinating Ghost Story

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

I WOULD NOT care to have been a boarder, or even a casual visitor, at the home of Phoebe Garvis and her sisters, Emma and Milly. The Garvis home, according to Kenneth White's new play, "The Lady Who Came to Stay," was a gloomy mansion that existed about the turn of the century, a monument to the bad taste of the nineties, an asylum for three mad women and—until it was happily burned down in the last act—a playground for ghosts.

Yet, although I would quicken my pace upon passing such a macabre house at nightfall, I must confess that the play itself, from the safety of an orchestra seat in the Maxine Elliott Theater where Guthrie McClintic has staged it so effectively, reaches out and holds one fast in the clutch of its diabolic fascination.

Mr. White touches only lightly upon the case history of the Garvis family, which comes originally from the ghost story by R. E. Spencer, and it would be rather interesting to a student in abnormal psychology to know something more of the ancestry of the three lunatic ladies who inhabit this living tomb when the curtain rises. We do know that the entire conflict is predicated on the sisters' unnatural love for a dead brother, and their hatred of the woman who married him.

Unfortunately, at this point, the widowed

sister-in-law and her daughter are forced to come to the Garvis home to live. No situation more unwholesome could be conceived, unless it might be to have in the whole Hubbard family from The Little Foxes, and the two daffy girls and their sister-murderess, from Ladies in Retirement, as house guests.

Sister Phoebe is the family sadist and the ring leader in the attempt to drive her brother's widow either into insanity or death. Sister Emma is the weak slave of Phoebe's witchery. Sister Milly is the mentally deficient nymphomaniac in whom there is left just enough humanity to try to block the demoniac forces symbolized by Phoebe.

Frightful events crash upon each other's

echo. The sister-in-law dies of a stroke just as Phoebe is about to thrash her daughter. Thereafter her ghost, now tinkling at the piano and now appearing in the doorway, haunts Phoebe until she in turn dies and becomes an ever present phantom. Then the conflict rages between the two shades (with Sister Milly as an interlocutor) for possession of the souls of the daughter and a 16-year-old son who has, up to this point, rather mercifully been excluded from the horrible household.

I will not reveal the result of the battle, except to say that at the play's conclusion bright flame and pungent smoke seem to be making a purge of the mansion, ghosts and all.

Mr. McClintic's cast is admirable in every respect, and there is a certain grim humor in the method of his selecting the actors for these dreadful roles. Evelyn Varden, the sweet and lovable Mother Gibbs of Our Town, becomes Sister Phoebe and is thus metamorphosed into the most fiendish female you ever saw on the stage with the possible exception of Tallulah Bankhead's Regina. The witty and clever Mildred Natwick is changed, as though by witchcraft, into the pitifully cracked Sister Milly with the staring eyes of a lost soul. The stately and lovely Mady Christians has become the black and sinister Sister Emma. And these three estimable ladies pour their all into their respective characters, pulling no punches, softening no blows, shading no gestures.

Beth Merrill is forceful as the victim of the sisters' hatred and Augusta Dabney, making her second appearance on Broadway this season, is utterly charming as the daughter who escapes the nest of insanity.

I am not going to suggest that you see "The Lady Who Came to Stay" unless you have a passion for seeing three female Boris Karloffs operating simultaneously. But if you like that idea, go and have a good fright for yourself.

"Flight to the West"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 31, 1940

"Flight to the West" Adds a Tense Drama to Broadway List

"Flight to the West," drama by Elmer Rice. Produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Guild Theatre, New York, Dec. 30, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE has been a kind of exalted integrity in the determination of Elmer Rice to write of world conditions with a tolerant understanding, if not an altogether open mind, ever since he wrote "Judgment Day" and suffered for his unbridled bias.

In his new play, "Flight to the West," shown at the Guild Theatre last night, he again calls sanity and wisdom to aid him in his exposures and his arguments.

This drama, taking a mixed assortment of passengers on board a Yankee Clipper flying west out of Lisbon for the United States, is a dramatic indictment of the evils grown out of the "irrational madness" that has set up totalitarian dictatorships across the seas.

But it also is as thoughtfully moderated an argument as an honest liberal can write in his effort to explain the viewpoint and uncover the blind spots of a ruthless opposition.

Fellow Travellers

The Rice protagonists in "Flight to the West" include a young married couple, the Charles Nathans, he a third or fourth generation Anglicised Jew, she an old-stock American.

Their fellow passengers include a Nazi diplomatic agent, a would-be Nazi spy, a family of French refugees bombed out of Louvain, an American oil magnate who would let Big Business settle everything; another belligerent American lady columnist and several other types pertinent to the current international situation.

They argue. They threaten to fight. The lady columnist, following the lead of young Mrs. Nathan, whose father has been a United States consular agent for years, helps land the spy in British hands.

There is a shooting and finally a landing in New York, with a promised peace and security still far in the future, but with a satisfying start made in their direction.

With the action confined to the lounge cabins of the Clipper plane, Mr. Rice is forced to depend greatly upon threatening argument for suspense and interest.

Despite his handicap, I think he succeeds admirably in creating both.

Cabin Tricks

It is assumed that conversations cannot be heard between cabins. This permits the separation of the plotters when conspiracy is afoot.

Private cabins are at the rear of the plane. This permits the clearance of the lounge for intimate and personal conversations. Thus we are privileged to hear with reasonable logic the theatrical plottings of the Nazis and the domestic intimacies of the troubled Nathans.

Young Mrs. Nathan is happy in the thought that she is leaving a war-torn world behind and coming home to peace and security. Happy, too, in knowing that she is going to have a baby. Then she discovers that there is a threat of misery in either adventure.

There can be no peace in a world dominated by warring and embittered races. There can be no happiness in giving birth to another Jewish child to suffer as persecuted peoples have suffered.

Logical Reasoning

The conclusions that come out of the Rice argument are not too theatrical, and the intelligent playing of a group of fine actors consistently holds attention.

Betty Field, a favorite heroine in any circumstances, is the worried Mrs. Nathan. Hugh Marlowe her protective though mud-died husband. Paul Herried, an English actor newly come to America, lends force and distinction to the chief Nazi and Arnold Moss is finely persuasive as a philosophical analyst.

There is a tense dramatic performance by another newcomer, Lydia St. Clair, as a French refugee. Constance McKay is the lady columnist. James Seely, Boris Marshakov, Eleonora Mendelssohn, Karl Malden, Grandon Rhodes, Helen Renee—all give excellent performances in short parts.

The Jo Mielischer setting is impressively handsome and seemingly entirely practical, and Mr. Rice's skill in depicting his characters in their cramped quarters is fascinating.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 31, 1940

Elmer Rice's 'Flight to the West' Opens at the Guild Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WE MAY as well admit at the start that Elmer Rice's "Flight to the West," which opened at the Guild Theater last evening, has many faults and that some of them are serious enough to lessen the play's impact. With that admission out of the way, we may go on to what matters. What matters is that "Flight to the West" is a moving, deeply intelligent play and the first since Sherwood's "There Shall Be No Night" to go about the theater's major business.

The theater's major business is to reflect, and comment upon, the life its writers see and feel around them. In that life, at the moment, the struggle between two ways of living is of pre-eminent importance.

Of that struggle Mr. Rice is writing. He limits its protagonists to the people who can take passage on a trans-Atlantic Clipper, bound, some of those aboard hope, from Europe's tragedy to America's serenity. But the passengers bring the world's unrest with them.

A girl and her Jewish husband are flying home and she dreams of a placid, suburban life. He is more restless in the world. He is one of the many liberals whom events have unsettled and left groping. An older liberal who has spent his life writing against war,

cannot guide him. Nor do the tragedies of the other passengers make it easy to shelve the argument. A Belgian woman is bringing back her blinded American husband; bringing, too, a daughter who lost an arm in a bomb burst and a baby born by the roadside in France. A hopeless Jewish woman, who sees for her race only endless persecution, is aboard. An American Fascist bellows of the good in Hitlerism. Cooped with these are a Nazi diplomat and a Nazi spy.

These last characters provide the play with a trickle of plot, and sometimes this plot, swollen by the rain of dramatic necessity, sweeps aside what is important in the play. But basically, "Flight to the West" remains a play of thought and discussion. And when, in the end, the young Jewish husband is wounded while protecting the Nazi diplomat, the plot becomes fully part of the play. Its climax leads to the author's clear statement of belief: that the conflict is one between rational madness and irrational sanity—between the inhuman juggernaut of logic and the feelings and faiths and uncalculated actions which make life human. Essentially, Mr. Rice's play is an engrossing and moving study, and often an illuminating study, of today's bitterly confusing world.

The play is too much broken into little stories, often told under unconvincing circumstances, although the stories themselves are moving and convincing. It waxes and wanes in intensity and never achieves mounting force. The plot is comparatively trivial and the young wife, emotionally the central character, is the weakest and least persuasive of the Clipper's passengers. Compared with such a steadily cumulative drama as Rice's long-ago "Street Scene," "Flight to the West" represents inept playwrighting.

Among the actors Hugh Marlowe is excellent as the young husband and Paul Herried is curiously effective as the Nazi. Boris Marshakov plays the spy with amusing ingenuity and Arnold Moss does a fine job as the older liberal. Eleonora Mendelssohn and Lydia St. Clair play afflicted women movingly. Betty Field, however, is sweetly monotonous as the young wife, enhancing the ineffectiveness of the part.

It should be fine if "Flight to the West" were perfect. But whatever its imperfections, it is emphatically a play to see.

"Flight to the West"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 31, 1940

Flight to the West New Propaganda Play

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ELMER RICE has written a new propaganda play that seems to have been compounded out of the writings of Dorothy Thompson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and William Allen White on the one hand and the Apocalypse of the Third Reich, Mein Kampf, on the other. This, as you may well imagine, is no equal contest, and the Americans win the debate without much opposition. Nazism is, after all, a pushover.

Mr. Rice's argument was staged by the Playwrights' Co. last night at the Guild Theater under the title *Flight to the West* as their second offering of the season by a cast of players who were rather more alive than the play itself.

The audience and I agreed, in the main, with nearly all of Mr. Rice's arguments. He is making certain declarations of principle, among them that the Nazi philosophy is a cruel, insane manifestation which will crush civilization unless it is checked; that it can be checked only by Britain and America plus the remnants of those nations Hitler has persecuted and enslaved, and that America is the last bulwark of liberty.

Unfortunately for Mr. Rice's play, we have heard all this before. As a result *Flight to the West* becomes as obvious as a speech at a political rally. It is not provocative of thought, although it may stir some emotions.

Jo Mielziner has staged a beautiful setting for Mr. Rice's debate. It is the cross section of a transatlantic clipper, complete with lounges, retiring rooms and a full set of flying officers, who seem to be taciturn but efficient

sea dogs. Into this ship Mr. Rice pours the symbols of conflict—a Nazi diplomat on his way to Washington and accompanied by a fellow spy; a young American Jew and his Aryan wife; a woman refugee from Germany; a man blinded by a bomb in Belgium, his maimed daughter and his almost demented wife; an American oil magnate who is all for appeasement; an American philosopher returning from Germany who is against appeasement; and an American newspaper woman who is Dorothy Thompson to the core, and who succeeds only too easily in unmasking the spy and the diplomat.

The questions Mr. Rice asks are these: Shall the young Jewish husband take up arms in defense of America despite his married status, the wishes of his wife and the fact that he is about to become a father? And shall the young wife bear a child into such a sorry world as this? Mr. Rice answers both ques-

"FLIGHT TO THE WEST."

A play in three acts by Elmer Rice. Staged by the author. Designed by Jo Mielziner. Presented at the Guild Theater on December 30, 1940, by the Playwrights' Company. The cast:

Richard Banning.....	Kevin McCarthy
1st Portuguese Mechanic.....	Ralph Benson
2nd Portuguese Mechanic.....	Malvin Gates
August Himmelreich.....	Rudolf Weiss
Thomas Hickay.....	Paul Mann
Edmund Dickensen.....	Don Nevins
Marie Dickensen.....	Lydia St. Clair
Lisette Dickensen.....	Helen Renee
Louise Frayne.....	Constance McKay
Col. Archibald Gage.....	James Seely
Count Paul Vasilich Vronoff.....	Boris Marshalov
Frau Clara Rosenthal.....	Eleanora Mendelssohn
Dr. Herman Walther.....	Paul Herried
Howard Ingraham.....	Arnold Moss
Hope Talcott Nathan.....	Betty Field
Charles Nathan.....	Hugh Marlowe
Capt. George McNab.....	Karl Malden
Arthur Hawkes.....	Grandson Rhodes
1st Corporal.....	John Triggs
2nd Corporal.....	Harold Dyrenforth

tions affirmatively. Then he emphasizes the nobility of the humanitarian mind as opposed to the regimented Nazi mentality by having the Jew step in front of a bullet intended for the diplomat.

A splendid cast deliver these wordy commentaries intelligently and convincingly, a tribute to Mr. Rice's able direction, and it must be said for *Flight to the West* that during most of its seven scenes there is an atmosphere of reality. And six or seven characterizations are worthy of special praise.

Miss Betty Field has come a long way since she was one of George Abbott's comedy fledglings. Hollywood seems not to have spoiled her direct, simple style of acting. In *Flight to the West*, however, wins its fight before it has scarcely begun, and the easy victory is not sufficiently stimulating to make it the extraordinary drama we had hoped for.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 31, 1940

Journey by Clipper

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS good to listen to a play once more that talks about something of contemporary import, and feels passionately about it. The so-called escapist works can be cheering to all of us, but in these times of tremendous world drama it isn't well for any artistic medium to remain too securely in its cloister. Elmer Rice's "Flight to the West" is seriously concerned with the state of the universe, with the problems of Fascism, liberalism, appeasement, isolation and race injustice, with the immediate exigencies of war and peace. The author is grim and clear-eyed and in deadly earnest about them, and, although his play has a certain monotony about it and not all the eloquence that might have been hoped for, it is almost steadily interesting and occasionally quite moving. In addition, it is excellently played by an admirable cast, and its mind and emotions are healthy and forthright. Put it down as a welcome and effective piece of dramatic journalism.

For the purposes of his dramatized editorial, Mr. Rice takes us aboard a transatlantic clipper bound from Lisbon to New York in the days immediately following the collapse of France. His passengers are the assorted lot that the melodramatic actualities of wartime Europe make tragically plausible in the theater these days—a young American of partially Jewish blood and his non-Jewish wife, a sardonic Nazi diplomat, a Russian who is a German spy, a wealthy Texas oil man, a thoughtful and bemused liberal author and a group of refugees, maimed in either body or spirit. Save for a spurt of gunplay in the last act, the narra-

tive is without much action or excitement, and Mr. Rice is chiefly interested in the mental and emotional states of his characters and their reactions to the torrential course of history and the destiny that has flung them together. All of them have their say at considerable length, and I do not think that the playwright has been unfair to any of them. If the Nazi diplomat is unsympathetically studied and his sentiments seem the savage outpourings of a maniacal child then you must blame Nazi philosophy and not Elmer Rice.

Of all the characters in the play, my conviction is that the most interesting and sinister is not the diplomat or the spy but the hearty Texas business man. He is the sort of homespun fellow who fancies himself as the best of Americans and yet he is the one whose entire conduct gives the most aid and comfort to Fascism. He has met Hitler and Mussolini and Goering and Franco and

he has found them regular fellows, just folks, and although, of course, he doesn't believe in all their ideas he does feel sure we could learn a lot from them and could at least do business with their countries. Mr. Rice understands him completely and he has pilloried him with skill and understatement. The other characters seem to me slightly more obviously of the theater, but they are proper mediums for the expression of the ideas that the author wanted to discuss. It is the liberal writer who in the one truly eloquent speech of the play expresses the author's conviction, which, I may say, is not for head-in-the-sand isolation or appeasement. He feels, too, that the Nazi savagery is the reason for believing in eventual Nazi disaster, since the destruction of decent emotions is a sure way to self-destruction. Like Mr. Sherwood, his fellow member of the Playwrights' Company, Mr. Rice still is an optimist.

The setting of the interior of the clipper, as designed by Jo Mielziner, is realistic and effective, even though it seems that the Atlantic planes take off from the water much rather than do any of those things which I ever crossed the Pacific. And the acting is of enormous help. That fine actor, Arnold Moss, plays with particular skill the liberal who is the author's mouthpiece, and Paul Herried, who is likewise playing a Nazi villain in the current British film, "Night Train," is especially effective as the German diplomat. Miss Betty Field gives her usual attractive and sympathetic performance as the wife, who wonders whether she should bring a Jewish baby into the world, and Hugh Marlowe is excellent as her troubled husband. Every one in the cast deserves commendation, but there should be a particular word for Miss Lydia St. Clair as an embittered Belgian refugee, for little Miss Helen Renee as her maimed child, for Miss Eleanora Mendelssohn as a German Jewish victim of oppression, for Karl Malden as the skipper of the plane and, especially, for James Seely, the oil man. "Flight to the West" is welcome topical.

"Flight to the West"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 31, 1940

"Flight to the West" Staged at the Guild

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH a stolen pistol is fired, a passenger is wounded, a Nazi secret agent is taken into custody at Bermuda, and a man attached to the German Embassy in Washington gets into awkward difficulties as the clipper journeys from Lisbon to New York in Elmer Rice's new play, there are many moments when "Flight to the West" seems more like a "Town Meeting of the Air" than a drama.

If his latest work is loosely articulated as a play, it nonetheless holds the interest as a discussion group. Frankly it gives wings to a debating society, lifting its members to what is physically at any rate a new altitude. For in "Flight to the West" what Mr. Rice has done is to take advantage of a novel setting to lend novelty to what is familiar in his practice.

It is not the first time Mr. Rice has turned a trans-Atlantic crossing into a forum for the contrary-minded. When last he did so his platform was a huge ocean liner and his Public Address System a far less satisfactory script known as "Between Two Worlds." Although his types are once again suspended and self-declared between continents in "Flight to the West," they benefit at present from wearing labels which events have printed in larger letters. They are representatives of a crisis which nowadays is in the bloodstream of everyone's living.

A Troubled World

The modern world, its hatreds and its tragedies, its conflicting hopes and ideologies are Mr. Rice's concern backstage even as they are ours out front. His self-appointed

task as a dramatist has been to find individuals who could represent them and make them vocal. A Nazi diplomat, a secret agent for Germany, traveling with a forged British passport, a Texas oil man who talks democracy but is subconsciously a Nazi, a pathetic Belgian mother who is half-crazed by the sufferings she has undergone, her blinded husband, their little girl who has lost one arm, a Jewish woman who has been exposed to the horrors of racial intolerance, two American liberals—an older man and a woman journalist, and a fine young American Jew, married to a Christian girl who is carrying his child and dreams of what she thinks will be the peace of the United States after the anguishes of Europe—these are the passengers Mr. Rice has assembled to speak for the dissensions and the pains of the contemporary world.

In presenting their points of view and

stating his own faith in a greater democracy, Mr. Rice is more often sustained by the unavoidable interest of his subject matter than he is by the dramatic merits of his writing. His play, in spite of its welcome moments of grease-paint tension, may be for the most part unwritten as a play. It may consist largely of a long series of conversations in which autobiographical misfortunes or opposing political faiths are aired above the strangely hushed roar of an airplane's motors. Still one listens to the talk, not because much which is new is said, but because we all know that our living, no less than the living of those who are speaking, is involved in the conflict.

Mr. Rice may have forgotten to dramatize the issues in "Flight to the West." Yet even when he states them bluntly as a debater he shows that he is an intelligent and sensitive man, awakened to the dilemmas and distresses of the present. His choice as a believer in democracy happens to be the sanity of instinctive action rather than the madness to which cold reason can lead when pushed too far.

As a director Mr. Rice is in better form theatrically in this production by the Playwrights' Company at the Guild than he is as a dramatist. Mr. Mielziner has supplied "Flight to the West" with a tempting enlargement of a cross-section of the clipper. And a large cast is almost uniformly good. Although Betty Field seems somewhat lost as the young wife, Hugh Marlowe is admirable as her Jewish husband, Constance McKay does an unforgettable bit as the half-crazed Belgian woman, and Paul Herried, James Seeley and Boris Marshakov are excellent as the suave German diplomat, the oil man from Texas, and the Nazi secret agent. The evening's outstanding performance, however, is the gloriously restrained and moving one given by Eleonora Mendelssohn as the older Jewish woman who has faced the brutalities of racial hatreds.

It would be pleasant to be able to report on the whole of "Flight to the West" in the glowing terms which must be the writing of Miss Mendelssohn. But the simple truth is that, though Mr. Rice's new play holds the attention, it creates no real enthusiasm.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 31, 1940

Elmer Rice's 'Flight to the West' Dramatizes the Passenger List of an Atlantic Clipper

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ELMER RICE has written one of his most stirring dramas, "Flight to the West" he calls it. Under management of the Playwrights' Company, it was acted at the Guild Theatre last evening. Assembling a number of passengers that represent several nationalities, he is flying them in a transatlantic clipper from Lisbon to New York, giving them plenty of time to talk, and stinging their conclusions with melodrama. The talk is plain and blunt, such as you have heard and read for at least two years; and the melodrama is not particularly inventive.

But the effect is remarkably absorbing, for the talk tells some of the bitter truths of today against the sounding boards of reality. Out of the newspapers and radio, it takes concrete shape before your eyes. As his own director, Mr. Rice has cast the play brilliantly. The acting is as straightforward as the talk. Mr. Rice has a good mind, passionate convictions and complete knowledge of the theatre, and "Flight to the West" is the most absorbing American drama of the season.

The choice of characters is almost inevitable for a play about current affairs—a newly married American couple, an American oil merchant, an American intellectual, an American columnist (female

according to current fashion), a Jewish emigrée, a crumpled family of Belgians, a Russian professor, a Nazi diplomat bound for Washington. Coop them for two days and night inside a fleet airplane and you can forecast what they will say. Except for the conclusions, which rationalize Mr. Rice's loyalties today, he does not wander far from the familiar topics of the hour. The Belgian woman recounts the mournful story of the terror of invasion, and the Jewish lady relates the dark things that have gathered in her heart.

But when you see them embodied in the tragic acting of Lydia St. Clair and Eleonora

Mendelssohn and hear them on tired voices, they acquire a personal anguish that is profoundly moving. The debates between the imperious Nazi diplomat and the other hostile passengers strike fire. For Mr. Rice has reduced the intellectual conflict to sharp and cutting words and he has also given the Nazi diplomat the courage of his convictions. Dr. Hermann Walther is the villain of this melodrama, but still a man of strength and logic. When the test comes he is ruffled, but Mr. Rice has left his character intact behind the icy veneer of his philosophy.

The part is played with pitiless clarity by Paul Herried, who acted in Vienna until the Nazi influence spread too fast for him. His acting is brilliant, without a soft spot anywhere. But it is impossible to find any one in the cast who does not measure up to the opportunities "Flight to the West" provides. Betty Field's glowing young American wife and Hugh Marlowe's young man, anxious about the chaos of the moment, give the play recognizable humanity. Arnold Moss, an actor of growing strength and flexibility, creates a vibrant character as the contemplative intellectual, Constance McKay as the sentimental columnist, Boris Marshakov as the Russian traveler, James Seeley as the oil merchant, Kevin McCarthy and Karl Malden as chief members of the crew—act with color and conviction.

But it is no reflection on the other members of the cast to observe that the European actors play with special insight. Miss Mendelssohn, Miss St. Clair and Mr. Herried know the human agony they live under the simple vigor of Mr. Rice's dialogue. They know what it means. Against Jo Mielziner's immaculately modern setting, they raise "Flight to the West" out of journalism into personal drama. Mr. Rice has given shape and rhythm to the sprawling picture of life today. "Flight to the West" ranks with "Street Scene" as his best work.

"The Flying Gerardos"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 30, 1940

Florence Reed Acts Mother of a Trapeze Troupe in Nicholson's and Robinson's 'Flying Gerardos'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LET a graduate student fall in love with a trapeze artiste and, willynilly, you have "The Flying Gerardos," which was put on at the Playhouse last evening.

It is the joint product of two writers who frequently turn up with pungent ideas—Kenyon Nicholson, who wrote "The Barker" and "Dance Night," and Charles Robinson, who collaborated with Mr. Nicholson on "Sailor, Beware!" and "Swing Your Lady," which was the romance of a female blacksmith. For the present, we will forget Mr. Robinson's ode to a bawdy-house, "Mahogany Hall."

There is something especially inviting about the notion of a dusty-lunged college grad taking up with a circus act, and most people in last evening's audience appeared to be satisfied with the treatment Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson have bestowed on it. But this vigilant department, teasing with professional discontent, felt that the authors had nothing beyond the idea to contribute. If they could create characters with some of the energy they squander on the scribbling of stock parts, they might send their idea flying through the air with raciness and enthusiasm.

Granted that it is funny to see how the Gerardo troupe recoils in horror from the thought of education. When Donna is discovered hiding "The Story of Mankind" in bed, uttering stray bits of knowledge and going to museums and lectures with Bill Wentworth of Columbia's graduate school, the

Gerardos behave as though smallpox had broken out in their dormitory. That is funny, as acted against a background of circus tights and an occasional cartwheel. The authors also make a good point when they explain that a hollow-chested student is no proper match for a well-developed trapeze artiste, who, incidentally, confesses, to her shame, that she has never had a headache in her life.

But, like stock writers, the authors let it go at that. What "The Flying Gerardos" needs is a little imagination in the portrait of the student. The conflict of mind and body might yield wholesome comedy if the mind were half as lively as the body with which it has fallen in love. But Bill Wentworth is a nitwit; he could never fascinate a librarian, let alone a lady of the trapezes, and his response

'THE FLYING GERARDOS'

A play in two acts by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson; directed by Mr. Nicholson; designed by Horton O'Neill; presented on December 29, 1940, at the Playhouse by Edward Choate. The cast: Doc Vermillion Harlan Briggs
Opal Jack Sheehan
Josephine Evans
Donna Josephine Evans
Lois Hall
Ozzie John Call
Eadie Dorthy Hinkley
Pearl Iris Whitney
Chick Lyle Bettger
Haasah James Marriott
Mama Florence Reed
William Wentworth Richard Mackay
Mrs. Wentworth Susanna Jackson
Dr. Jellicoe Charles Francis

to snugs and plain talk is less than human. Moreover, the humor of big words and recondite allusions in the presence of uneducated people is about the flattest humor in the writing craft. When they want to be particularly hilarious Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson quote Darwin's definition of the origin of species.

Mechanically written, "The Flying Gerardos" is mechanically directed. As the head of the troupe, Florence Reed pounds vigorously through the part like a creaky-voiced harri-dan. Since that is the way the part is written, she plays it straight. Lois Hall acts the part of the trapeze girl with the awakened mind and acts it pleasantly enough for the occasion. As the mental colossus, Richard Mackay apparently does what he has been told to do, but a different choice in casting might have improved the play. This department's enthusiasm goes out principally to Harlan Briggs, whose folksy, big-mouthed, hose doctor has genuine flavor. His acting is what "The Flying Gerardos" might be if it were not what it is, only better.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 30, 1940

Love Gets Under the Big Top And Irks 'The Flying Gerardos'

"The Flying Gerardos," comedy by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson. Produced by Edward Choate at the Playhouse, New York, Dec. 29, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

SEEMS to me I recall reading that Kenyon Nicholson, sometime professor of the drama at Columbia University, took a few weeks off last Summer and went travelling with a circus in search of atmosphere for the comedy called "The Flying Gerardos."

Or perhaps it was Charles Robinson, his collaborator. In any event there is a good deal of what you might call affectionate realism in the comedy as it is staged by Mr. Nicholson, and was offered at the Playhouse last night.

It was not always effective realism. It is pretty hard to take a group of actors, Equity or mongrel, put them into tights, provide them with a circus vocabulary and expect them either to look the part or develop a complete authenticity.

But it is an amusing and interesting attempt at a realism that is comparatively novel on the stage. Somebody else did try a similar stunt in a piece called "Off to Buffalo," with Joe Cook. But that concerned a house full of vaudevillians in Jersey.

"The Flying Gerardos" stems from an interesting idea: the contrast of physical perfection and complacent illiteracy with a high mentality housed in a frail physique.

Donna, the baby Gerardo, discovers in her late teens that she doesn't know anything but the triple twist, or some other highly spectacular flight through the air. She feels an urge for knowledge.

Accidentally she meets William Wentworth, who is cramming for his Doctor's at Columbia. William's erudition both awes and fascinates her. She nurses the acquaintance. Even introduces William to the other Gerardos.

Fair Evening

There are seven of them and all seven are proud of never having cracked a book. "Phooey!" for William, the poor shell! Mama Gerardo, who has mothered the greatest flying team in show business for years, doesn't propose to have Baby Donna ruined or the act broken up. William experiences a difficult and sometimes comic adventure.

This all provides a reasonably amusing theatre evening. Nothing to cheer about, nothing to fume about. Edward Choate, the producer, representing Trapeze Productions, Inc., has provided a good working cast, with Florence Reed assuming a red wig and a red temper as Mama Gerardo and Lois Hall fitting her appealing treble to the pleadings of Donna. A young man from the radio drama, Richard Mackay, does exceptionally well with the role of the studious William, and there are a variety of short parts well played.

It is at least a hard-working troupe. In one or two new acts of tights three or four times during the evening. The one set, a top floor Brooklyn interior, is by Horton O'Neill and well done. Last night's audience was apparently well pleased.

"The Flying Gerardos"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 30, 1940

Aerial Artists

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

BEING specialists in the racier types of humanity, Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson have authority on their side when they tell us that acrobats are the salt of the earth. There is a conviction about which I am in no position to argue, but it is my unhappy suspicion that the authors of the celebrated "Sailor, Beware" are not altogether persuasive on the subject in their new play, "The Flying Gerardos." Although the playwrights are obviously filled with a great affection for Mama Gerardo and their eight pupils and seem to think that their juvenile is one of the luckiest young fellows in the world when he is finally permitted to join them, it is my own feeling that these single-minded aerial artists, with their great jealousy for the honor of their profession, are less colorful than they should be and by no means as likable as the dramatists wanted to make them. Undoubtedly they are fine people with an innocent directness that should be admirable, but it is my guess that there is more than a touch of dullness about them, too.

"The Flying Gerardos" is the love story of the youngest and prettiest of the acrobats (although the playwrights tell us that we

shouldn't call them acrobats, but "leapers"). She, it seems, fell in love with a bookworm and when Mama found it out she was fit to be tied, or thereabouts. If Donna dared to marry this ridiculous young interloper she would be committing an act of betrayal. So Mama and the other Gerardos set out to break up the prospective match, only to persuade the weakling invader of their home that he, too, wanted to become a Gerardo. Since poor Donna had grown to hate professional athletes and to have a crush on things of the

mind the fact that she isn't able to get away from the circus after all, but must see even her husband, who was to rescue her, becoming the clown of the act, it strikes me that, for her, the new play lacks a happy ending. My own objection, though, is that, where the characters and the dialogue should have been warm and racy and the situation filled with comic invention, "The Flying Gerardos" is thin, flat and comparatively colorless in its people, its talk and its events. Even a bit of trapeze work doesn't enliven it sufficiently.

The cast, however, is not only expert but active. Miss Florence Reed doesn't have to perform on a trapeze, but she does have to be very picturesque and colorful in her perhaps slightly strident impersonation of Mama Gerardo. Richard Mackay not only takes his tossing around by the Gerardos with considerable aplomb but manages to be sympathetic and not too extreme in his characterization of the youthful intellectual who wants to join the circus. But, as has already happened this season, the best performance in the cast is the one contributed by that excellent young actress, Miss Lois Hall, as the Gerardo who wanted to get away from the act and ended by marrying the new member of it. The futility of her effort to escape somehow reminded me of the hopeless fashion in which those Chekov characters used to try to get away to Moscow. Harlan Briggs is good as a friendly veterinary, and the other players are satisfactory. But I still think that "The Flying Gerardos" could have done with more comic invention and less bathroom humor.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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An Excellent Gift Solution

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"The Flying Gerardos"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 30, 1940

Flying Gerardos Shows Life of Trapeze Artists

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE FLYING GERARDOS, a new play by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson, which provided New York with its first Sunday night opening, tells all about the curiously restricted life that is led by trapeze artists, their single-minded outlook on the world, their clannish loyalty to each other, and their fear, amounting to aversion, of formal education. It is scarcely complimentary to the intellectual standards of the circus performer and less so to the audience. I found it hackneyed in theme and dull in execution.

Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson have attempted to write a folksy story about a quaint circus matron who owns, operates and dominates over eight aerialists of assorted sizes, ages and sexes. Her greatest problem arises, naturally, when the youngest of the girls falls in love with a bookworm out of the other world.

The conflict between brain and brawn con-

tinues through four sultry scenes until, as you guessed, the brainy outsider, whose puny physique won't permit him to swing on the trapeze, is allowed to join the show as a clown, and, presumably, wed the girl athlete. The Gerardos, from Mama down to the baby, Donna, are all stock figures drawn from

countless pieces of circus fiction. Pride is physical perfection and scorn for less gifted humanity is their chief characteristic. Their loyalty to the "family" is marked chiefly by jealousy of interlopers and dispositions that are allergic to all forms of learning, even English.

Mama, the tyrant, is played by Florence Reed, who did her best with the stereotyped role and who, to my mind, rather overdid its general "cuteness." Her make up was unbelievable—something like the bedridden old harriidan of a grandma in *The Primrose Path*—and her speech ran the gamut from nasal Yankeeisms to hoarse colloquialisms of the big top. I am sorry to say that throughout the play I failed to see Mama Gerardo. I saw only Miss Reed in a masquerade.

Under Mr. Nicholson's direction, too, Richard Mackay who played the part of the bookish young man, was also a caricature rather than a real person, both in makeup and mannerism.

Much happier, despite the banal lines she was called upon to speak in her love scenes, was Miss Lois Hall (who last appeared as the lovely Mary Lamb in *Susanna* and the *Eldorado*), and who continued to demonstrate her aptitude for the stage in what was the most believable performance of the evening.

The Gerardo boys were also well mannered and well cast. Jack Sheehan, Lytle Bettger and James Marriott were helpful, and John Call, always an effective actor, turned in an excellent performance.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 30, 1940

'The Flying Gerardos,' a Farce, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "The Flying Gerardos," which opened at the Playhouse last evening, a graduate student at Columbia meets and falls in love with a beautiful lady of the flying trapeze who lives in a Brooklyn boarding house full of panting aerialists. She admires his mind, but he, spurred on by slighting references to his physical equipment, resolves to become a man among he-aerialists. In spite of the slightly baffling experience undergone last evening at the Playhouse, I still think this is a pretty good idea for a farce.

Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson also thought it was a pretty good idea for a farce, and "The Flying Gerardos" resulted. In it William Wentworth, who wears glasses and is working on a thesis, falls in love with Donna, who wears tights and hasn't

a thought in her pretty head until she meets William. Then she gets books out of what the other Gerardos call the "library." While she

is cultivating her mind, William goes to work on his biceps. The Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson have carried the idea one step further. In their version William gets on a practice trapeze and falls off.

At this point the authors lapsed, rather disconsolately, into what appears to have been a coma. Little more occurred to them, except to have the various members of the Gerardo troupe, one after another, refer to a library as a "libery." They did achieve two reasonably good curtain lines. Mr. Nicholson, by arrestingly inept direction, managed to muffle the first completely. The second, spoken by Florence Reed, came through good and clear. But one curtain line does not make a farce.

Neither does one good idea, as "The Flying Gerardos" proves. Inventiveness, pace in writing and direction, and bite in the lines are also needed. There is nothing to say about "The Flying Gerardos," really, except that all these necessary ingredients are lacking. It is only the blueprint of a farce, as Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson, who wrote "Salvor Beware" some years ago, managed to do so little this time I haven't the faintest idea.

Miss Reed has one of those floating parts, detached almost entirely from what little plot there is. She is, as always, amusing when the chance offers. So is Richard Mackay as the studious William and so, with even fewer opportunities, is Lois Hall as Donna. The rest do what is indicated, which is mighty little.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 30, 1940

Florence Reed Seen in "The Flying Gerardos"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE aerialists who supply "The Flying Gerardos" with its title and its atmosphere are a promising lot theatrically. To playwrighting they introduce a new profession—colorful, proud, and rich in its possibilities. They live in a world apart, these people who fly through the air with the greatest of ease, even when they condescend to keep their feet on this one.

No earth-bound mortals can approach Kenyon Nicholson's and Charles Robinson's new comedy without having their hopes go soaring. But at the Playhouse, alas, these hopes are soon dashed to the ground with no net to catch them. Because though the authors of "The Flying Gerardos" have a proper respect for "leapers," the comedy they have written is an inadequate expression of the admiration they feel for them.

It is mainly "atmosphere" and hardly any

play at all. Such a play as does emerge is a silly, inept, and far-fetched little killjoy which, while trying to be gay, is downright servile in its obedience to the law of gravity.

Wasted Material

Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson are tire-somely concerned with pitting brain against brawn without giving either one of them a break. Into the Brooklyn quarters of the darling Gerardos, they send a puny graduate student from Columbia who has awakened the mind and heart (though heaven knows why or how in either case) of the fairest girl in the Gerardo troupe. The rest of the Gerardos, especially the red-headed old Mama who manages them, have no other choice than to be disgusted with such a poor advertisement for book-learning. But finally (again for reasons best known to the authors) a satisfactory conclusion is supposedly reached when the book-worm forswears his education and is permitted to join the Gerardos under the big tent as a clown.

Although Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson deserve credit for having realized the novel possibilities offered by the home-life of such professionals as the Gerardos, they merit no thanks for having wasted their characters and their atmosphere on such a play.

Florence Reed acts the red-headed Mama with energy and an unctuous appreciation of what is colorful in her speech. Lois Hall is often charming as the love-sick Donna. And Richard Mackay doubtless does everything that could be done to make the Columbia student sound less like a persuasive argument for illiteracy. But the sad truth is there is nothing that they, or the others, can do to save the comedy in which they find themselves from its grave and ever-mounting defects.

"Meet the People"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 26, 1940

"Meet the People" New Revue at the Mansfield

By WILELLA WALDORF

LAST night, just one year after it opened in Hollywood, "Meet the People" arrived on Broadway for a stay at the Mansfield Theatre. For months now stories of the excellence of the little Hollywood revue have wafted Eastward. Its popularity on the Coast remains undiminished. A second company is still playing it in the film capital.

"Meet the People" is an unpretentious, intimate show that reminds you now and then of "One for the Money" and "Two for the Show," of "The Garrick Gaieties," of "The Grand Street Follies," of the "Little Shows," of "Pins and Needles." Yes, very often of "Pins and Needles." That's going to be its chief difficulty on Broadway. It is sure to remind New York audiences of so many revues that have gone before.

Out in Hollywood it must have seemed very, very fresh and charming, smart and even clever here and there. Here it seems fresh now and then, but often stale. Charming it is off and on, only occasionally clever.

It is always refreshing to see a group of energetic, enthusiastic, youngsters having the time of their lives putting on a show. The fourteen girls and fourteen boys who dance and sing and play sketches, and also act as chorus on occasion are a merry crew, and four or five of them give every indication of fresh, original talent.

And although the revue was first staged on the Coast for the purpose of calling to the attention of cinema moguls some aspirants for film honors ignored by the studios, the

company does not present the brassy, worldly-weary front of screen "starlets." For the most part, the people you are meeting are pleasant people.

The Union Motif

"Meet the People" goes in for politics less than did "Pins and Needles," the garment workers' revue, but it insists rather strenuously on the Union Card. Unfortunately, very few of its songs or sketches in this style are up to the standard in satire or humor of the last and best edition of the garment workers' show. Best of the numbers in this genre is a song called "The Same Old South" in which a couple of gentlemen sing a salute to dear old Dixieland in the sentimental fashion of the old minstrel shows, with blistering lyrics picturing the South as a land of lynching, child labor and Negro degradation. In the less socially conscious manner, one

of the merrier presentations is "Let's Steal a Tune From Offenbach," in which a composer named Sigmond (no last name mentioned) is urged by Chopin, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Debussy and Ravel to lift something from Offenbach for a change. The Offenbach music that is accordingly stolen is not as well sung as it ought to be, but the number nevertheless is a high-light of the performance.

A young man named Jack Gilford proved very amusing in sketches involving a movie patron (complete with Milt Gross gadget of the Goldberg-Joe Cook school), and also as a man named Smith who has his dreams analyzed by a psychiatrist. An incredible looking fellow, well named Doodles Weaver, was funny as a radio announcer describing a race on the Indianapolis speedway, and had moments imitating President Roosevelt, but his number involving millions of rabbits was too much of a poor thing.

Elizabeth Talbot-Martin had her inning as a dance caricaturist, and no doubt her impersonations of Hepburn, Garbo, Aimee Semple McPherson and Mrs. Roosevelt were good, but we have seen all the mimicry we can stand for this century. Marion Colby had the very amusing to draw the assignment of doing a dead-pan nightclub singer version of some of the hit songs. Virginia O'Brien, who did it first on the Coast, was brought here last season by the Shuberts in "Keep Off the Grass." It's no novelty any more.

The others helped out here and there. Michael Doyle displayed a good baritone voice, Josephine Del Mar had her South American way with one of those hot female numbers and Nanette Fabares did a coloratura struggling with Verdi, indicating that she might have quite a nice coloratura of her own aside from the comedy. A number of the songs are tuneful and pleasant.

Altogether it's a brisk little revue, recommended to the not over-fussy, and to those who haven't seen too many Broadway revues in the past. A program note said: "Any similarity between the order of the program and what you see on the stage is purely accidental." They don't take their show too seriously, thank Heaven.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 26, 1940

West Coast Revue Has Good Songs, Clever Skits and Youth

"Meet The People," revue staged by Danny Dare with Jay Gorney; music and lyrics by Henry Myers. Produced by the Hollywood Theatre Alliance at the Mansfield Theatre, Dec. 25, 1940.

★ ★+

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

FOR about one hour at the Mansfield, last night, it looked as though Hollywood had sent us something to make up for those recent comedies. The sketches and the dances and the specialties in "Meet The People," a new revue, were clicking with precision and dispatch and you found yourself sitting at strict attention.

But somewhere before intermission the satiric little revue done by Hollywood's Theatre Alliance, which came here with such sparkling advance notices, had to bog down. Maybe because we had so much "Pins and Needles" to compare it with; maybe because the frustration of American youth is currently overshadowed by more harrowing things, and maybe just because Buddy De Sylva came back from the West Coast a year ago with the musical shows he came back with.

There's a young comedian named Jack Gilford who is excellent as a sleepy listener at a union rally, a girl named Elizabeth Talbot-Martin with unique comic impressions, a Marion Colby to do the surefire trick of dead-pan singing which Virginia O'Brien brought here first, and capable and pretty singers and dancers. But there are also some pretty slimy specialty entertainers. Every once in a while, too, the good comrades must try something which sounds like a Daily Worker editorial set to music.

The Alliance is an organization of young entertainers and solid, experienced writers

and directors. Thus the material is almost always brilliant but, after a while, you find yourself wishing for the topnotch talent it deserves. The bright young animal spirits are fine, it's true, but you'd like to see the Alliance round up some of those good, audience-wise old vaudevillians who can be shovelled out of any Hollywood hotel.

Music is by Jay Gorney, a local grad, and it is a fine score. "The Stars Remain," "Chichicasteango" and "A Fellow and a Girl" are topnotch. Mortimer Offner's sketches are generally novel and original. And in "Union Labor," another Broadway truant, Danny Dare, does a smart and swell piece of dance direction.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 26, 1940

'Meet the People'

THE girls are pretty, both as dancers and principals, and the sketches are socially significant, but "Meet the People" misses being biting social satire by several yards. Last night a friendly audience greeted the Hollywood Theater Alliance's revue warmly. The sketch writers and the players choose not to take themselves too seriously when contemplating social injustice. They take the edge off their satire by displaying an iron sense of whimsy. As an example there is a sketch about the young couple indebted to a real estate broker, who, in turn, must pay the banker, who, it is hinted significantly, will foreclose the mortgage on the young couple's new home in a year's time. Then there is a particularly unhappy bit of spoofing about union labels in which the wife's lover can do everything save wear non-union clothes. As it emerged last night, "Meet the People" might well be called the poor man's "Helzapoppin'."

Here and there a glimmer of honest burlesque arises in the proceedings. Marion Colby does a thorough job of caricaturing dead-pan blues singers. Jack Gilford comes through as a comic craftsman of some standing in the community in a sketch written by Milt Gross. He explains how films are made and impersonates the stock characters of gangsters and mystery motion pictures.

The music written by Henry Myers and Jay Gorney has an edge over the prose material "The Stars Remain" and "Chichicasteango" are catchy tunes and manage to overcome what social implications the composers place in them. To the credit side of the revue put a willing and young cast, some times besting its material. To the debit side, write down in red ink material that misses fire.

J. P.

"Meet the People"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 26, 1940

Fine Talent in Meet the People

AND now step up and meet the people who have been guilty of fomenting all the subversive laughter in Hollywood for the better part of a year. Being a sociable gathering and having met all the people at Hollywood and Vine, it has moved on, via Chicago, to the Mansfield, where it is eager to pick up a new host of friends and acquaintances. That it opened last night, in conflict with another major musical, was an act of sheerest sentimentality; having first entered upon the sunkist world the last Christmas night, it was determined to celebrate a first anniversary by declaring open house in Manhattan.

Their hospitality is impeccable and from the lively way they pursue their entertainment it looks as though their exuberance has not been dimmed after a long year. Some folk who go East and West have come back with the report that the revue was the film colony's challenge to New York's Pins and Needles, and so it is at first or a lengthier glance.

The folks out there have been thinking things over, too; the balmy climate being conducive to the same kind of rhyme and reason that inspired the International Ladies Garment Workers to the song and dance in local precincts. And under the auspices of the Hollywood Theater Alliance which, as the program intimates, is a cooperative of talent that had been cooling its heels outside Central Casting, put on a revue with, as Mr. Dubinsky's wards proudly hail it, "a point of view."

The Hollywood folk on the Mansfield stage are poking pins and needles into the well-known, vulnerable institutions with good-humored sarcasm and at times, indeed, when the victim should be crying "Ouch!" But the assault is being conducted with a great deal of brilliant levity and considerable amusement.

It's Hollywood's fault for having overlooked the fine talent that Meet the People has turned up. Mortimer Offner and Edward Eliscu have lavished the show with a num-

ber of sketches that touch pointedly and often hilariously on topical foibles, Henry Myers has turned in a variety of lyrics that are quite singable as well as sociological—and Henry Myers has written a pleasant score to fit the words.

They have left few targets out of their shooting range. Although their main target is the Hollywood bedlam, they are shooting at everything and everybody, including the dictators abroad, Almee Semple McPherson at home, and they include among the baubles to be burst wide open with hilarity the dear old Southland of Gone With the Wind, the Tin Pan Alley desecrators of the crypts of Offenbach and Debussy, and the U. S. Senate comes in for a minor share of the good-natured pillorying.

For the most part it is a youthful contingent that is energetically entertaining at the Mansfield. Everything the scouts have been forwarding from the Coast about a young gentleman named Jack Williams is true without exaggeration, for he is a brilliant dancer with a pleasant, personable manner. In Meet the People we have the original of a multitude of imitators of a new and humorous singing style. She is Marion Colby, whose deadpan warbling is vastly amusing.

And though he is no stranger to the owlish New Yorkers, Jack Gilford's drolleries put the audience in a state of near-hysteria last night, while in Elizabeth Talbot-Mar-

'MEET THE PEOPLE'

"Meet the People," a revue in two acts and thirty scenes. Sketches, lyrics and music supplied by Henry Myers, Jay Gorney, Milt Gross, Henry Blankfort, Mortimer Offner, Edward Eliscu, Ray Golden, Bert Lawrence, Danny Dare, Mike Quin, Ben and Sol Barsman and others. Sketches directed by Mr. Offner; scenery by Frederick Stover; costumes designed by Gerda Vanderveer and Kate Drain Lawson; lighting by Roy Holmes; staged by Mr. Dare; produced by the Hollywood Theatre Alliance. At the Mansfield Theatre.

Principals—Jack Gilford, Doodles Weaver, Nanette Fabray, Elizabeth Talbot-Martin, Jack Williams, Peggy Ryan, Eddie Johnson, Jack Albertson, Barney Phillips, Marion Colby, Ted Arkin, Dorothy Roberts, Jack Boyle, Patricia Brilhante, Josephine Del Mar, Robert Nash, Virginia Bryan, Fay McKenzie, Marie DeForest, Robert Davis, Louis Paul, Angus Hopkins, Beverly Weaver, Sue Robin, Norman Lawrence, Berry Carew, Kenneth Patterson, Michael Doyle and others.

tin's mimics of Katharine Hepburn and Garbo, among others in her scathing repertoire, the attendance last evening seemed to take huge delight. You will find the others—there are numerous others in the cast—a cheerful and zestful throng, eager to meet you hospitably.

No frothy extravaganzas, as the sponsors would rather not have it be, Meet the People is more luxurious to look at than Pins and Needles. Put it down to the inescapable Hollywood influence. But it is an affable show with an adult point of view, and not quite subversive enough for Representative Dies to investigate.

GEORGE ROSS.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 26, 1940

A Hollywood Revue

'Meet the People' Opens at Mansfield Theater.

A YEAR ago on Christmas night a group of ambitious young performers, abetted by some professional writers and directors, produced out in Hollywood a topical revue called "Meet the People." Hollywood liked it, and it thrived so well that the original company decided to head east, leaving a second organization to carry on in movie land. After stops in San Francisco and Chicago, these players celebrated the first birthday of "Meet the People" last evening by giving Broadway a look at their show at the Mansfield Theater.

Their decision to try New York must have been influenced, it seems obvious, by the great success here of the Garment Workers' topical revue, for "Meet the People," with its slant to the left, is somewhat a Californian "Pins and Needles." The program explains that the Hollywood Theater Alliance, which is sponsoring the revue, was started in an effort to prove to the film scouts that there was plenty of talent right at their doorstep that they had overlooked.

And that "Meet the People" has turned up some talent there is no denying. Whether it has enough, however, to make it a serious contender for the honors won by "Pins and Needles" is something else again. It all gets under way happily with the orchestra playing enough of Jay Gorney's gay score to give the audience time for a good look at Milt Gross's amusing curtain, and with the Californians coming down off the stage to shake hands with the audience in a friendly fashion. But once they climb back behind the footlights some of the gaiety becomes a bit forced despite the breezy clip at which it is all run off, and there are moments during the evening when one suspects that the movie scouts were at least not 100 per cent wrong.

The quality of the skits, of which there

are a goodly number, is a bit uneven. Some, such as the cannibal scene, have the proper sting, but the world has moved quite a way during the last twelve months, leaving a few a trifle dated and at least one in the early part of the show wearing the label smug. A number of them could have been better played also last night.

On the other hand, there are some excellent things in "Meet the People." For instance, there is the "Grapes of Wrath" number, with its "No Lookin' Back" song sung movingly by Michael Doyle. Then there is Jack Gilford telling amusingly of the movies he has seen and Elizabeth Talbot-Martin and her laugh-provoking caricatures of Katharine Hepburn, Greta Garbo and Mrs. Roosevelt and her second-act burlesque of classical dancing. In the A-1 category, too, are Marion Colby, whose deadpan, twitch-of-the-shoulder singing numbers are a delight, and a lanky tap dancer named Jack Williams.

Like the girl in the rhyme when "Meet the People" is good it is very good. But when it is not, it's just so-so.

HERRICK BROWN.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES
December 26, 1940

Pleased to Meet You

WHILE the ermine and mink were pushing their way into "Pal Joey,"

Union Label was across the street at the Mansfield, and having a marvelous time, thank you. For out of the West there had come the Hollywood Theatre Alliance's "Meet the People," and the occasion was good, very good. Built up by various gloomy malcontents on the Gold Coast, the revue opened in Hollywood just a year ago, drifted here by way of San Francisco and Chicago and now is prepared to show Broadway what some of the Federal Theatre musicals were trying to do, and what "Pins and Needles" was trying to do also. The ermine should cross the tracks some time and meet the people.

As is generally known by now, the sponsors of the revue were a group of folk who felt much talent was going to waste in Hollywood, who felt, too, that working for the movies is not the highest form of art life. They found for the cast a group of young people who can sing and dance like nobody's business, they located a couple of comedians. Then writers set to work and turned out funny sketches and serious sketches, and almost all of them—at least after the first year's shakedown run—were better than average revue. The people joke with Hollywood, and the Senate of the United States, and with psychiatry. F. D. R., canalism and the radio. They do not joke with the Bill of Rights, the "Union Label" or the O.Kies.

In one scene, the "Meet the People" folk are giving you the "Senate in Session," plus (Continued on page 442)

"Pal Joey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 26, 1940

"Pal Joey" Smart and Novel

"Pal Joey," musical comedy by John O'Hara; music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart. Produced by George Abbott at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, Dec. 25, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

JOHN O'HARA has lifted his Pal Joey out of his New Yorker magazine sketches and made him the dancing hero of an original musical comedy. "Pal Joey," as you might expect, is the title and the Gene Kelly you may have seen as the hoofer in "The Time of Your Life" has been assigned the part.

They bowed in, as the saying goes, at the Ethel Barrymore theatre last night and surprised that somewhat unlucky stage with a hit. Mr. O'Hara, though new at this business, has been able to sustain some semblance of intelligence in his book. George Abbott, the producer, has picked an excellent company, the Messrs. Rodgers and Hart have spattered the score with pleasant songs and Robert Alton has contributed his usual assortment of arresting dances.

All of which is good Christmas news. If we can't depend on the dramas this year we can at least extract some satisfaction from the discovery that there are signs of new life in the musicals.

"Pal Joey" isn't exactly on the clean side. It will never make the White List. But neither is it cheaply or slyly smutty.

Likable Liar

It is the story of a braggart, a vainglorious but gifted lad who eases himself into night club entertainment in Chicago, acquires a Gold Coast lady patroness, opens his own club and finally achieves a kind of romantic success that fits well enough with the possibilities.

An amiable liar is Joey, crude in statement,

amazingly inventive in story. He boasts his way into the hearts and apartments of many women, loves and leaves them nonchalantly, and continues blithely on his way to succeeding adventures.

Happily young Mr. Kelly is able to give the part personal attractions that justify the O'Hara picture. He is likable as an individual and gifted as a dancer.

Technically his range is wide without including any impulse toward the eccentric, which makes for an agreeable artistic balance. It was a fortunate day for him, and for us, I think when Mr. O'Hara and Mr. Abbott picked him out of the group that helped to make "The Time of Your Life" a prize-winning play.

Vivienne Scores Again

Again Vivienne Segal, playing the adventuring patroness, is smartly cast. Not only is her straight performance credible and helpful to the story, but she also has one of the outstanding song hits, a revealing number called, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered."

June Havoc steps forward smartly as a comedienne with Fannie Brice tendencies. Lella Ernst adds a touch of demureness and decency that sweetens her scenes, and there are added incidents in which Jack Durant, Shirley Paige and Jean Casto each do a bit of show stopping.

The ensemble is lively and talented. It has to be to keep up with that man Alton. The scenery is in Jo Mielziner's most entertaining mood. The satire on Chicago night club crudities is often screamingly funny.

"Pal Joey" adds definitely to the current competition in musical entertainment, and this is cheering.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 26, 1940

"Pal Joey" Presented at The Ethel Barrymore

By JOHN MASON BROWN

BY INTERMISSION time at the Ethel Barrymore last evening it seemed as if Christmas were destined to come to an extremely merry ending for those of us who were seeing "Pal Joey." Mr. Abbott's new musical had got off to a promising beginning. The old conventions of the song-and-dance show had been cast happily into the discard. Originality was more than in flower; it was in full bloom.

John O'Hara had seen to this. He had provided a book, novel and imaginative, in which the hero was no hero at all but a bum; in fact, that very same bum who is prized by readers of the New Yorker for his prodigious yarn-spinning. Accompanied by Mr. Rodgers' sprightly music, benefitting by some of Mr. Hart's glibest rhymes, with its dances vigorously directed by Mr. Alton, with Mr. Mielziner and Mr. Koenig more than taking care of its visual needs, and with such gifted performers as Gene Kelly, Vivienne Segal, and June Havoc on hand to project its fantasy, "Pal Joey" looked during its first half as if it were going to prove one of the season's brighter arrivals.

Then, alas, came the intermission. Thereafter hopes began to dwindle slowly, and pleasure to ebb. The Joey who had talked his way into becoming a master of ceremonies in a Chicago night club, and then into the affections of a rich society woman, gradually ceased to be a pal. As his saga was extended to include threats from blackmailers and the loss of his patroness, both he and the musical to which he gives his name ended up by being downright trying.

A Good Start

An amusing line would from time to time continue to be heard. A stray number would bob up as entertaining as the one in which

Jean Casto chants the intellectual preoccupations of Gypsy Rose Lee when strip-teasing. But from the moment of Jack Durant's entrance and as the book gained in prominence, "Pal Joey" somehow began to slip. At first imperceptibly; then so noticeably that its slipping can only be described as a fall.

This sour report is made with sorrow by one who started off the evening finding much to admire. Mr. O'Hara can, of course, write with a magical mastery of dialogue. To the idioms of daily speech he is able to add a sharp flavor of his own. His mind is happily unorthodox. And, heaven knows, there is room for imagination in the book-making of our musicals.

Unfortunately, however, the evening's adroit showmanship and its genuine originality are finally downed by what is directionless and unimportant in its story-telling. Although Mr. O'Hara starts off delightfully by doing it the hard way (as Mr. Hart phrases it), the way he has chosen proves in the end to be as hard for the audience as it was agreeable at the outset.

'MEET THE PEOPLE'

NEW YORK TIMES

(Continued from page 441)

Dorothy Roberts and Ted Arkin, who are the street's snappiest jitterbugs. In another minute they give you Jack Williams, a dancer who does a modern version of an old polka. From there they move to "The Same Old South," in which Eddie Johnson and Jack Albertson, dressed as a couple of straw-hatted vaudevillians of two decades back, who sing of the South with the most blandly cynical lyrics in many a day. Then take a Milt Gross sketch which tells you how the movies are made, and then meet Jack Gilford, comedian. Go no farther. Mr. Gilford, as a movie fan, gives an animated lecture on the double feature and trailer which is the last word in that sort of thing.

Production numbers? Love songs? There are both. The music, with an occasional piece by Giuseppe Verdi and Offenbach, is by Jay Gorney, who last was around Broadway with part of the songs of "Americana," way back in 1932. "A Fellow and a Girl" is a nice song, also "No Lookin' Back" and the number called "Let's Steal a Tune From Offenbach." A Spanish number called "In Chichesternango" is excellent, from Josephine Del Mar, who sings it, to the brightly arrayed chorus which later dances. Not long before you see "Elmer's Wedding Day," a gay, stylized dance pageant with just a touch of social significance—yes, all these things—you hear a gentleman named Doodles Weaver telling the legend of a thousand rabbits. Which probably is fair enough, for "Meet the People" has pulled many more than enough of them out of Hollywood's high hat. L. N.

"Pal Joey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 26, 1940

John O'Hara's 'Pal Joey' Is Offered at the Barrymore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JOHN O'HARA'S "Pal Joey," the heel of the night clubs, leads a much rougher life on the musical comedy stage than ever he did in the columns of the New Yorker, but he is almost as funny. "Mice" who would gladden his heart surround him now at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, where Mr. O'Hara, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart celebrated his adventures last evening. He even achieves stardom in the night club of his dreams.

In writing Joey into a musical comedy, which incidentally bears his name, Mr. O'Hara has kept the character inviolate, if that is a possible word for Joey. His head is on roller bearings whenever girls pass, and to Joey every girl is a "mouse." He chisels and tells tall, preposterous stories of an improbable past. He gets himself picked up by a Chicago lady of wealth and roving eyes and she sets him up in a club of his own until, of course, she turns him out. True love intrudes faintly on Joey's saga, but it doesn't matter much as long as he is surrounded by mice in pretty, frill dresses.

There is not really much plot in "Pal Joey" and what there is starts slowly, groping along through much of the first act. After that things roll wickedly. The heedlessness of Joey is thoroughly explored; from Mr. O'Hara's amusedly ruthless examination, Joey emerges as one of the most substantial, and one of the funniest, characters ever to take a stand among the

shadows of musical comedy. Much of the humor of the show, and it is occasionally rich, grows out of the irresistible Joey-ness of Joey.

Mr. Hart has written gay tunes to go with the tale and Mr. Rodgers has written some of his brightest—and certainly some of his roughest—lyrics. He manages to rime "narcissus" and "missus" in one song called, slyly, "The Flower Garden of My Heart" and illustrated outrageously by June Havoc and John Koenig, who can think up some of the weirdest costumes anybody ever saw. He gives Miss Vivienne Segal, who runs away with a good deal of the show, a handful of pleasant songs to sing. The best, and wickedest, of them is "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewil-

"PAL JOEY"

A musical comedy in two acts; book by John O'Hara; music by Richard Rodgers; lyrics by Lorenz Hart; dances directed by Robert Alton; scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by John Koenig; production staged by George Abbott; presented at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on December 25, 1940, by Mr. Abbott. The cast:

Joey Evans	Gene Kelly
Mike Spears	Robert J. Mulligan
The Kid	Sondra Barrett
Gladys	June Havoc
Agnes	Diane Sinclair
Linda English	Lella Ernst
Valerie	Amarilla Morris
Albert Doane	Stanley Donen
Vera Simpson	Vivienne Segal
Escort	Edison Rice
Terry	Jane Fraser
Victor	Van Johnson
Ernest	John Clarke
Stagehand	Jerry Whyte
The Tantor	Jack Durant
Melba Snyder	Nelson Rae
	Jean Casto
	Dummy Spevlin
Ludlow Lowell	James Lane
Commissioner O'Brien	Cliff Dunstan
Assistant Hotel Manager	

dered." And Mr. Rodgers' music is admirable for Gene Kelly to dance to, in the intervals when he is not acting the title role up to the instep.

Now and then, in spite of its virtues and its originality, "Pal Joey" stops rolling and stumbles into routine. This keeps it from being quite the knockout every one had expected. It leans a lot, if that bothers, and both settings and costumes are more characteristic than ornamental. But it is always lived and almost always funny. And its humor has, at its best, a sharp, distinctive flavor.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 26, 1940

Pal Joey Is a Bright Gay, Tuneful, Novel Work

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

JOHN O'HARA'S hilarious confessions of a night club hooper, which have been one of the happiest features of the New Yorker magazine, have been turned into a musical comedy, as was perhaps inevitable. And, thanks to the expert direction of George Abbott and the aptitude of a young man named Gene Kelly, Mr. O'Hara's delightful sense of satire is unimpaired. It is a bright, novel, gay and tuneful work, made interesting by the rich characterizations of its book.

There are moments, particularly in the second act, when its speed slackens and the musical comedy atmosphere changes abruptly into something approaching melodrama. I think this happens when Mr. Abbott becomes so engrossed with Mr. O'Hara's finely drawn characters that he forgets for the moment the boys and girls who are waiting for their dance cues off stage. It is, however, the first musical comedy book in a long time that has been worth the bother.

Joey Evans (Pal Joey), as you may know from Mr. O'Hara's letters, is a self-assured young singer and dancer who works the lower class dives in Chicago. No vices, in particular. That is, he is no bound for liquor and he lets nose powders strictly alone. He has an eye, however, for any pretty mouse who catches his eye, and in this particular episode he becomes entangled (quite innocently, consider-

ing the results) with a wealthy near-widow who stakes him to a partnership in a glittering club. The lady tires of her bargain and Pal Joey is out on his ear, still cheerful, happy and on the make for the next mouse that comes his way.

Mr. Abbott has staged the musical comedy with a seeming inside knowledge of the Grade C "clubs" that provide Mr. O'Hara with his background. He burlesques the managers, the hangers-on, the waiters, the dances and the songs that are seen and heard in a joint that is bound to be called Chez Joey. His costuming is in humorous keeping with the atmosphere. It is star spangled, gawdy

and abbreviated. The lyrics of Lorenz Hart, to the music of Richard Rodgers, are equally brilliant in their reflection of night club life—smoky and blue. One of them, "That Terrific Rainbow," sung by the terrific June Havoc, with terrific color effects and terrific costumes, is a colossal, devastating commentary on the kind of a floor show that seems so magnificent after two drinks of Chez Joey's scotch. Mr. Rodgers' theme song is called "I Could Write a Book. It is a lovely melody, although somewhat reminiscent of Do I Love You? Other songs, chiefly memorable for lyrics that sometimes skirt dangerously close to the risqué and sometimes plunge right into it—but always wittily—are "In Our Little Den" and a charming little item called "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered."

The cast is top flight. Gene Kelly, who may be remembered as the dancing comedian of "The Time of Your Life," is made for the part of Pal Joey. He brings out the amusing worthlessness of the young man, his cocky self-confidence, his magnificent pretensions. He maintains a certain amount of naivete even during his most ruthless chase after one of his mice. And he is extremely attractive. Mr. Kelly dances amazingly.

Vivienne Segal's delightful personality, the loveliness of her voice and the perfection of her acting helped to make the comedy vivid and real. Miss Havoc, the terrific gal, made the general atmosphere authentic, and Lella Ernst was an attractive and proficient engueuse. Jean Casto's specialty, satirizing the intellectuality of a strip-tease artiste, was one of the high lights of the evening.

Mr. Abbott's chorus girls are running a few pounds heavier this year and are not of the languid and undernourished type that has been the vogue. Their plumpness in no way interfered with the acrobatic agility demanded in Robert Alton's vigorous and breathtaking choreography.

"Pal Joey" is a smart show. It will make you think twice before you go again to a night club called Chez Joey.

"Pal Joey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 26, 1940

Christmas Night Adds 'Pal Joey' to the Musical Stage

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF IT is possible to make an entertaining musical comedy out of an odious story, "Pal Joey" is it. The situation is put tentatively here because the ugly topic that is up for discussion stands between this theatregoer and real enjoyment of a well-staged show. Taking as his hero the frowny night club punk familiar to readers of a series of sketches in The New Yorker, John O'Hara has written a joyless book about a sulky assignation. Under George Abbott's direction some of the best workmen on Broadway have fitted it out with smart embellishments.

Rodgers and Hart have written the score with wit and skill. Robert Alton has directed the dances inventively. Scenery out of Jo Mielziner's sketchbook and costumes off the racks of John Koenig—all very high class. Some talented performers also act a book that is considerably more dramatic than most. "Pal Joey," which was put on at the Ethel Barrymore last evening, offers everything but a good time.

Whether Joey is a punk or a heel is something worth more careful thinking than time

permits. Perhaps he is only a rat infested with termites. A night club dancer and singer, promoted to master of ceremonies in a Chicago dive, he lies himself into an affair with a rich married woman and opens a gilt-edged club of his own with her money. Mr. O'Hara has drawn a pitiless portrait of his small-time braggart and also of the company he keeps; and Gene Kelly, who distinguished himself as the melancholy hooper of "The

Time of Your Life," plays the part with remarkable accuracy. His cheap and flamboyant unctious, his nervous cunning, his trickiness are qualities that Mr. Kelly catches without forgetting the fright and gaudiness of a petty fakir. Mr. Kelly is also a brilliant tap dancer—"makes with the feet," as it goes in his vernacular—and his performance on both scores is triumphant. If Joey must be acted, Mr. Kelly can do it.

Count among your restricted blessings Vivienne Segal who can act with personal dignity and can sing with breeding. In a singularly sweet voice she sings some scabrous lyrics by Lorenz Hart to one of Richard Rodgers's most haunting tunes—"Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered." June Havoc applies a broad, ranky style to some funny burlesques of nightclub routines and manners. Jean Casto satirizes the strip-tease with humorous condescension. As a particularly rank racketeer, Jack Durant, who is a sissable brute, contributes a few amusing and dizzy acrobatics. This department's paternal heart goes out especially to Lella Ernst who is the only uncontaminated baggage in the cast.

Occasionally "Pal Joey" absents itself a little from depravity and pokes fun at the dreariness of night club frolics, and at the close of the first act it presents an admirable dream ballet and pantomime. Joey's hopeful look into a purple future is lyrically danced by Mr. Kelly. There is a kind of wry and wistful beauty to the spinning figures of Mr. Alton's dance design. But the story of "Pal Joey" keeps harking back to the drab and milky world of punk's progress. Although "Pal Joey" is expertly done, can you draw sweet water from a foul well?

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 26, 1940

Night Club Portrait

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

FROM John O'Hara's savage letters of a night club entertainer, a brilliant, sardonic and strikingly original musical comedy has been devised. There have been hard-boiled girl-and-music shows in the past, as all followers of Mr. B. G. DeSylva's works can testify, but none of them has been so completely and unrelentingly tough as "Pal Joey." Even such carnivals as "Panama Hattie" and "Du Barry Was a Lady" have had at least a core of sentimentality, but "Pal Joey" remains gayly rough-and-ready to the end. The quality that has made Mr. O'Hara's writing so robust, salty and realistic has been captured with fine gusto, and, combined with one of Richard Rodgers's most winning scores, some of Lorenz Hart's finest lyrics, the brilliant staging of dances that Robert Alton always provides, an utterly satisfying cast and George Abbott's most expert manipulation, the result is a delight. Put down "Pal Joey" as an outstanding triumph of a suddenly awakened theatrical season.

It does not come altogether as a surprise to find that Mr. O'Hara can write skilfully for the stage. In all of his work his gift for dramatic dialogue has been notable. But it is none the less remarkable to find that the O'Hara quality can be carried over into a musical comedy without losing any of its bite and its scorn. The portrait of a night club insect is so remorselessly set down that there might readily have been the danger that the effect would prove just a bit distasteful in a girl-and-music carnival. After all, a kept man is not the most appetizing of musical heroes. Yet Joey, in addition to being an unrelenting heel, is such a simple and essentially innocent boob and, particularly, he is so guilefully played by Gene Kelly, that he becomes curiously bearable on the stage. But the new show is not merely a picture of Joey. It is a bitter, satirical and yet strangely realistic account of the flora and fauna of the night club, done with such zest and scornful relish that it achieves genuine power.

The combination of Rodgers and Hart has always been a virtually perfect one, and now it is happily discovered that O'Hara fits in with them splendidly. Particularly is the spiritual kinship between Hart and O'Hara something to be applauded. Of the two it is rather surprising to find that Mr. Hart is somewhat the rowdier, but they do work together with wonderful success, so that the

prose of one and the verse of the other seem delightfully complementary. In a word or two the lyrics are characteristically brilliant. The music is so captivating that it is difficult to pick out favorite numbers, but I think my preferences at the moment go to the song euphemistically known as "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" and the romantic air called "I Could Write a Book," although every piece has more than the average merit. There are, in particular, two comic songs for Miss June Havoc that are effectively satirical. Mr. Alton's dances are again original and imaginative.

It was a happy stroke of casting that placed Mr. Kelly in the title role. This young man, who was so good last season in "The Time of Your Life," is genuinely life-saving to "Pal Joey" for, if the chief part were not properly cast, the new musical show might have been too merciless for comfort. Mr. Kelly does nothing obvious about softening his characterization but he does manage to combine a certain amount of straightforward personal charm with the realism of his portrait, so that Joey actually achieves the feat of being at once heel and hero. Miss Vivienne Segal, looking her handsomest, is both believable and properly human as Joey's wealthy mistress, and she manages her numbers with her usual fine skill. Miss June Havoc reveals real comic gifts as another dubious night club performer, and Jack Durant is completely in character as a blackmailing agent. The only decent person in the cast is the ingenue, and Miss Lella Ernst succeeds in making her, too, seem a human being. Miss Jean Casto has a good comic bit. In addition there must be a word for the effective settings of Jo Mielziner and the costumes of John Koenig. "Pal Joey" is a hard-boiled delight.

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Pasadena Playhouse

"My Sister Eileen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 27, 1940

'My Sister Eileen,' Very Bright And Gay, Opens at the Biltmore

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE funniest play in a long, long time popped brightly into the Biltmore Theater last evening. Its title is "My Sister Eileen" and its contributing authors are manifold. The stories of Ruth McKenney underlie it and lend a little of their warmth to its foolery. Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov wove some of the characters from some of the stories into the play. A generous, invigorating injection of George S. Kaufman was then administered, and when all was done they had something.

They had an unfaltering flow of pungent comebacks and some of the most hilarious situations that ever came to fruition under the nurturing care of Mr. Kaufman. They had pace and wit and lively characters. And above everything else, they had laughter. With Shirley Booth, Morris Carnovsky, Jo Ann Sayers and others to play in it, they had just about everything one could wish in the way of fast-moving, farcical comedy. They gave it to us last evening and we ought to be mighty happy.

They didn't, to be sure, get around to much of a plot, so "My Sister Eileen" remains a series of funny incidents, of which the very first is by just a shade the most comical. That memorable scene shows Ruth and Eileen—surname of Sherwood, not McKenney—landing in a basement apartment in Greenwich Village and meeting the landlord, a Mr. Appopolous. Mr. Appopolous, himself an artist of frightening productivity, is any man's nightmare of a Village landlord. His Apartment 1A somehow manages to sum up all the ex-

cruciating menace of apartments in the Village's lower levels. Those whose sheltered lives have never included tenancy in such caverns will never fully appreciate that of Mr. Appopolous—and, to be specific, of Donald Oenslager.

The girls have adventures. Strange people pop in. Eileen attracts men in droves. Ruth brings home a large section of the Brazilian navy. Meanwhile Ruth writes and gets rejections; Eileen haunts the outer waiting rooms of theater managers. At the very last gasp Ruth gets a job. That's all there is to it, except sparkle.

Admirers of Miss McKenney's gay, human stories may cavil a bit. The Ruth and Eileen at the Biltmore are only suggestions of the sisters whose escapades so long enlivened the columns of the New Yorker. The fun now is more obvious, and sharper. The wisecrack is elevated to stardom. "My Sister Eileen" has, in short, a strong Kaufman flavor. It is the

'MY SISTER EILEEN'

A comedy in three acts, by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, based on the stories by Ruth McKenney; staged by George S. Kaufman; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Biltmore Theater on December 26, 1940, by Max Gordon. The cast:

Mr. Appopolous.....	Morris Carnovsky
Ruth Sherwood.....	Shirley Booth
Eileen Sherwood.....	Jo Ann Sayers
Jensen.....	George Cotton
A Street Arab.....	Eric Roberts
A Pair of Drunks.....	Arthur Tell
Lonigan.....	Alva Milligan
The Wreck.....	Tom F. Dillon
Another Street Arab.....	Gordon Jones
Captain Fletcher.....	Bob White
Helen Wade.....	Charles G. Martin
Frank Lippencott.....	Joan Tompkins
Chic Clark.....	Richard Quine
Cossack.....	Bruce MacFarlane
Violet Shelton.....	David Macomber
Mrs. Wade.....	Emmie Afton
Robert Baker.....	Helen Ray
	William Post, Jr.

Six Future Admirals.....	Michael Ames
	Alan Brizex
	Peter Knego
	Paul Marion
	Mei Roberts
	Paul Seymour
Walter Sherwood.....	Donald Foster
A Prospective Tenant.....	Eda Heineman
The Consul.....	Joseph Kallini

very best Kaufman flavor, however, and one can sacrifice a lot for that.

Miss Booth's Ruth is a brisk delight, and Jo Ann Sayers is a gracefully clinging Eileen. Mr. Carnovsky revels in the role of Mr. Appopolous, and among the disarming horde which passes, mostly at a dead run, through the basement apartment Gordon Jones, George Cotton, Bruce MacFarlane, William Post, Jr. and Eda Heineman are especially memorable. But everybody contributes to "My Sister Eileen's" lively, happy crackle. Things look a lot brighter today.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 27, 1940

Greenwich Village Life

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SUDDENLY aroused to a decent outburst of activity, the hitherto groggy dramatic season gives us the third interesting new work of the week. The latest entry among the year's likely hits is "My Sister Eileen," a pleasant, friendly and humorous comedy based on Ruth McKenney's celebrated autobiographical stories of the same name. The new work, by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, is a series of ingeniously-strung-together episodes dealing with the random adventures of two Columbus, Ohio, girls engaged in battling for their careers and their honor amid the jungles of Greenwich Village. There is nothing particularly sturdy about it and it is more given to effective "wise cracks" than to drama, but in its quiet and unobtrusive way it is good, engaging fun. Pleasantly played and smartly directed, "My Sister Eileen" is a distinctly likable comedy. It might make the Village a tad once more.

There is something of the manner and quality of both "You Can't Take It With You" and "George Washington Slept Here" in the new comedy, and it is therefore not particularly surprising to find that "My Sister Eileen" was directed by George S. Kaufman. Since I do not know that Mr. Kaufman had anything to do with the actual writing of the play, I can only say here that he has decidedly left his mark upon it and that there are a

number of lines that give indication of bearing the master's touch. This means that the Fields-Chodorov work does lack any particular suggestion of spontaneity but that it is shrewd and smart and brightly entertaining. There is a warming and friendly quality about it and a believable sense of the wonder, the laughter, the touch of amiable insanity and the air of camping out which, those who have graduated from life in Greenwich Village tell us, were the stuff of life in that fascinating sector of metropolitan existence.

Since I was not among the more ardent admirers of Miss McKenney's stories when they appeared in "The New Yorker," I am unable

to say how closely the play follows their letter and their spirit. Anyway, the new comedy is a joyous and joyful account of the arrival in New York and in a slightly maniacal basement apartment of two girls bent on vanquishing the metropolis. Ruth wanted to be an author, and Eileen dreamed of being an actress. Ruth was always the dependable member of the family, and it was Eileen who, in her artless way, attracted all the boys. The moment they arrived in town people began using their apartment for their various purposes, nefarious, romantic and just plain insane, and their home was invaded by landlords with artistic pretensions, ladies of dubious reputation, professional football players, daffy newspaper men, magazine editors, soldiers, policemen and, as a sort of climax, a great portion of the Brazilian Navy. It is this arrival of the navy which provides the play with its most hilarious episode.

Once or twice the authors' invention begins to lag a bit, but, on the whole, the sagas of Ruth and Eileen are pleasantly hilarious. Also they hardly ever fail to be human and sympathetic, and for this great virtue much of the credit must go to the likable cast that has been assembled. Miss Shirley Booth, for example, is both briskly amusing and warmly agreeable as the steady Ruth, and Miss Jo Ann Sayers, a tall, pleasantly gangling and straightforwardly attractive young actress from the films, is delightfully wide-eyed and romantic as the eager Eileen. I think Miss Sayers is rather a find. Then there is the customary skillful characterization by Morris Carnovsky as the esthetic but practical landlord, and some of the invading men are excellently played by Richard Quine, Bruce MacFarlane, William Post Jr., and Gordon Jones. Donald Oenslager has contributed another of his atmospheric sets. I think you will have a pleasant evening at "My Sister Eileen."

"My Sister Eileen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 27, 1940

"My Sister Eileen" Is One of The Better Village Comedies

"My Sister Eileen," comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov. Produced by Max Gordon at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, Dec. 26, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IT HAS been a long time now since we have had a Greenwich Village comedy, and much longer than that since we have had a good one. "My Sister Eileen" is the best of the crop to date.

Naturally we of the theatre are bound to think that it is because George Kaufman staged it and Moss Hart took an interest in it. As shown at the Biltmore last night it is as thickly studded with the Kaufman-Hart type of line and situation as roasted hams are studded with cloves.

But it has had four other authors. Ruth McKenney, who wrote the "Sister Eileen" stories first tried a dramatization with Leslie Reade. Then Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov had a crack at it.

Finally Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart came into the picture: At the request, presumably, of Max Gordon, the producer.

Here It Is

However it happened, here it is, three acts of laughter and an evening of good, clean fun. It is artificially contrived, but effective. If it had a bit more convincing story value and a little less of the old village hokum, it might

easily have been another of the light comedy sensations.

Eileen and her sister Ruth come on from Columbus, O., looking for the same old job. Eileen wants to be an actress and Ruth wants to write stories.

They rent a basement flat in the Village from a lightly comic Greek, discover that they are living in an airless cave over a subway excavation job, surrounded by funny neighbors.

Because Violet Shelton, who was a shade on the promiscuous side, lived there before them

their casual callers frequently are embarrassing. Because Eileen is gorgeously young and beautiful she attracts men as a magnet attracts steel and keeps Ruth on the watch and the jump.

They are pressed for funds, misunderstood by the policeman on the beat, turned down by hard-boiled employers, and finally pushed into a brush with the Brazilian navy and the law. It was Eileen who kicked the police in the shins.

For New Yorkers

"My Sister Eileen" will not last for forty-eight years, like "Charley's Aunt," because only New Yorkers who know something about Greenwich Village will accept it at its face value.

But to those New Yorkers who do thus accept it, it should prove another of this season's pleasantest theatre escapes.

Shirley Booth plays the level-headed, wise-cracking Ruth, and plays her well. A pretty newcomer, Jo Ann Sayers, hailing from the University of Washington, the little theatres and the screen, is charmingly naive, unforced and natural in the name part.

Morris Carnovsky has the longest of the remaining roles, which is that of the Greek, but there are short parts also well played by Gordon Jones, William Post, Jr., Bruce MacFarlane, Richard Quine, and Eda Helneman, among numerous others.

The Donald Oenslager setting is realism plus, helpful to both the mood and action of the comedy. Last night's audience was as often in stitches as out of them.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 27, 1940

My Sister Eileen Is Surprisingly Hilarious

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE comic essayists who enliven our magazines are, in increasing numbers, beginning to brighten our theater. It is a little more than a year ago that the nostalgic humor of Clarence Day's writings about his father, God and kindred subjects, were fashioned into a play with the happiest results imaginable. Only this week some enterprising people made a Class A musical comedy out of John O'Hara's sardonic little tales about his Pal Joey. And now comes My Sister Eileen.

My Sister Eileen (which you should read if you haven't already done so) is a collection of short stories by Ruth McKenney. The essays, bubbling with rich humor, carry Eileen and her writing sister Ruth through childhood to adolescence and a little beyond. There is no particular plot to them. They are merely hilarious episodes in the lives of two girls who were able to see the humor of existence in a stuffy world, and who were able to transmit some of it to less understanding people.

From this collection Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov have now compiled a loosely connected but surprisingly hilarious play, which was presented by Max Gordon last night at the Biltmore Theater to an audience that loved every line of it.

Since the new play pretends only to recount the 12 months' period encompassed by the signing of a lease on a Greenwich Village

basement apartment and the evacuation thereof, and a few of the amazing adventures that befell the two girls during that short but frantic time, it is faithful to the spirit (if not wholly to the facts) of the original book. And, truthful or not, it turns out to be an engaging, heart-warming play with exceptionally high comedy content.

Eileen is the pretty one—the one who has stage aspirations and the honey personality that innocently invites passes from every man from 14 to 85 who has eyes in his head. Ruth is the plainer one (though not so plain in this instance, since it is lovely Shirley Booth who plays the part), and her bent is for literature.

Well, the two girls leave Columbus, Ohio,

in pursuance of their respective ambitions, and end in the toils of Landlord Appopolous and the most distracting apartment you ever saw. Through their basement grating the swirling life of the Village, its drunks and gamins, its hucksters and hustlers and occasionally its cops, seeps, flow and sometimes comes in an unwelcome deluge. Strange fungus grows on the apartment walls. The kitchenette is aptly described as "a nauseating nook." Blasting in the new subway cavern beneath rocks the building at unexpected intervals. Leering males who have been given the address by a forgetful trollop who previously inhabited the place invade the premises and refuse to leave. Finally six officers of the Brazilian navy follow Ruth home, under certain mistaken impressions, and create something short, but only short, of an international incident.

That doesn't sound much like a plot, does it? And it isn't. But in the writing of it, in the description of these untoward incidents, in the recurrent dilemmas there is food for free and fine laughter.

Shirley Booth is as perfect as can be as Ruth—the one with the brains, the common sense and what little brains there is in this engaging family. She is extremely effective in her handling of the crackling wit that comes in part from Miss McKenney's foundation and in part from the Fields-Chodorov lines.

Jo Ann Sayers, making her stage debut as Eileen, has not only the rare beauty that seems to be called for by the part, but a quality of starchy-eye innocence that is sweet and beguiling. She is a charming actress.

Morris Carnovsky's accent as Mr. Appopolous was scarcely that of one hailing from the hills of Greece, and his performance was less impressive than that of many he has given recently, including that in the late and unlamented Suzanna and the Elders.

The remainder of the cast played acceptably, but the honors go to Miss Booth and Miss Sayers.

Do yourself a big favor and see My Sister Eileen.

"My Sister Eileen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 27, 1940

'My Sister Eileen,' a Comedy of the Village

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AT LAST—at long last, in fact—an amusing comedy has come to town. Out of Ruth McKenny's New Yorker sketches, Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov have devised "My Sister Eileen," which was acted at the Biltmore last evening. Under George S. Kaufman's direction, which deserves equal billing, it emerges as the antic story of two orphans of the storm from Columbus, Ohio, who expose themselves to Greenwich Village and learn about life the hard way.

To Miss McKenny this hilarious theatrical version of her bright-edged sketches must come as a mixed blessing. Her sister, Eileen, was killed in an automobile accident last Sunday on the West Coast. That extra-mural tragedy is the only somber note hovering around the appearance of the first completely gay comedy on the dramatic stage of New York this season.

What happens to the two sisters from Columbus could happen. One is a prospective writer; the other one wants to get on the stage. Like any other emigrants from America, they take a cheap apartment in New York and proceed to look for jobs. It is the virtue of "My Sister Eileen" to regard Greenwich Village as a disorderly and completely fantastic place where no one behaves sensibly, and the evidence is wholly convincing. In

Village vernacular, the basement apartment with an arched window giving onto the sidewalk becomes a studio and the Greek landlord is a frustrated artist. An unemployed professional football player lives upstairs and for a time camps in their kitchen. And quite a variety of madmen trickles through their door—a drug-store counterpane with bohemian notions, a vagrant newspaper writer, a prostitute who once did business at the same address and, finally, six cadets from the romantic Brazilian Navy.

Not being sociologists, the authors of "My Sister Eileen" have served up the adventures

in the form of crack-brained comedy without much rhyme or reason. What goes on might be drab enough if Sister Ruth did not have a cutting tongue. But it is the genius of New Yorkers, who hate to be bored, to look on the normal activities of their town with disbelief, as though everything were a humorous dream. What is commonplace becomes incredible. The whole thing gradually develops into a nightmare of fabulous proportions. Thanks to Sister Ruth's acid tongue and the neatly turned dialogue that has been written for her, "My Sister Eileen" becomes a nimble-witted commentary on the humdrum foibles of Greenwich Village. Although sensible people do live there in fairly large numbers, you can forget all that in the presence of this play.

Mr. Kaufman is no rule-of-thumb director. Having his own peculiar relish for absurdities and knowing the pace and rhythms of humor-accurate stage larks, he keeps "My Sister Eileen" moving at high speed through guffawing crises. The basement window in Donald Oenslager's pungent set becomes a lively cyclorama of a musty New York street where drunks, vendors,urchins, cops and mothers airing the babies drift by. As Sister Ruth, Shirley Booth gives an admirably timed portrait of comic skepticism. As Sister Eileen, Jo Ann Sayers is attractive and plausible, though she has a good deal yet to learn about acting. Morris Carnovsky plays the Greek landlord with dry mischief, and Gordon Jones, Richard Quine, Joan Tompkins, Edie Afton, Eda Helman and William Post Jr. play other parts as lightly as they are written.

If everyone had Ruth McKenny's sense of humor the whole town would be as hilarious as "My Sister Eileen." That is, if Mr. Kaufman were town director, which might not be a bad idea at that.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 27, 1940

"My Sister Eileen," an Uproarious Comedy

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH subscribers to the New Yorker stand in Ruth McKenny's debt for many a hearty laugh, neither those who have relished her stories in that magazine nor those who know them as they have been collected in book form can have been prepared for the side-splitting play to which they have lent themselves. This play happens to travel under the same name as the volume known as "My Sister Eileen." But in the differences which exist between Miss McKenny's uproarious fugitive sketches that Harcourt, Brace have published and the brilliantly integrated comedy that shook the Biltmore last night like an earthquake of laughter one of the pleasantest (if most eloquent) lessons in dramaturgy can be found which the modern theatre has had to offer.

Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov are the playwrights who have turned to Miss McKenny's stories for the gold-mine from which to extract the funniest new play of the season. In so doing they have faced many of the same technical problems which confronted Russell Crouse and Howard Lindsay when, to everyone's good fortune, they dared to cull "Life With Father" from Clarence Day's memorable vignettes. If the resulting comedy is equally felicitous, and even more convulsing in its less universal fashion, Mr. Fields and Mr. Chodorov must undoubtedly join us all in thanking George S. Kaufman.

Both in the writing and in the production the Kaufman touch is upon every happy moment of "My Sister Eileen." What the Midas touch was with gold, the Kaufman touch is with laughter. There are those who scold Mr. Kaufman for not being Strindberg. They are the Sir Launfal of the American drama who keep seeking elsewhere for what they have ignored on their own doorsteps.

In Praise of Mr. Kaufman

Although with the chilliest of my critical brethren, I insist upon keeping the word "genius" on ice, the Kelvinator must be

robbed to describe Mr. Kaufman at his best. Genius is the only accurate term to apply to him when it comes to suggesting the consummate skill of his showmanship, his joyous mastery of the wisecrack, his fleet professionalism, his sharp sense of pace, and his magnificent invention when he has embarked upon one of his inspired excursions into the blissful realms of madness.

The pleasures Mr. Kaufman can provide may be of the moment. They may evaporate with the falling of the final curtain. They may be beyond the accounting of future historians and present theorists, both of whom are destined to write when those moments are past. This evanescence, however, is only a proof of the high virtues these pleasures can claim not as drama but as theatre. For the moments he fills with gaiety—the Kaufman moments—when nonsense is so supreme that life comes to a temporary halt and the ridiculous and the sublime seem near to being one, are experiences to be treasured. In a theatre they must be counted among the most enjoyable moments the stage has yielded in our time.

When he directed "Of Mice and Men" Mr. Kaufman showed how unsuspected and genuine was his range. But it is with comedy—his kind of comedy—that he is chiefly associated. There he is without a peer. And there, in his spottish form, he is to be found as a

director who is really a collaborator in "My Sister Eileen."

The comedy based on the interminable hints given by Miss McKenny's stories can be summarized in "P. S. She got the job." It is a side-splitting saga of the experiences of two sisters who come to New York from Columbus, Ohio, and take a basement apartment in Greenwich Village. One of these sisters wants to be a writer; the other (to whose beauty all men are susceptible) hopes to be an actress.

This, in its bare essentials, is all there is to "My Sister Eileen." In its materials it is like all the Greenwich Village comedies you may recall. In its basic fable it is much the same as were last year's "Night Music," "Two on an Island," "Young Couple Wanted." Yet it is like none of them. It is in part Miss McKenny and her lovely sister; in part the excellent cast Max Gordon has assembled; in part the work of Mr. Fields and Mr. Chodorov. But mainly, and triumphantly, it is George S. Kaufman.

Two Girls on an Island

What no synopsis can hope to indicate, what Miss McKenny's agreeable stories in no way suggest, is the unctious of the action, the insistence of the provocations to laughter, the goodness of the writing, or the evening's complete realization of all the absurdities that could ever overtake two such highly individual young women on Manhattan. The Greenwich Village basement Mr. Oenslager has established in every detail at the Biltmore refuses to stay below the street level. Its inhabitants send it soaring to the heights of nonsense, carrying the audience with them.

The cast is as expert as the writing, the setting, and the direction. As Ruth, Shirley Booth once again demonstrates her superlative skill. She is warm, human, resilient, hopeful. There is no other actress on our stage—including the dazzling Jean Dixon—who can excel her when it comes to the precise fring of a Kaufman line. Jo Ann Sayers is lovely enough to look at to do more than establish the credibility of the beautiful and bewitching Eileen. Gordon Jones, a professional football player, Morris Carnovsky as a landlord who dreams about art while sternly collecting the rent, Richard Quine as a love-sick drug clerk, William Post, Jr., as an editor suffering from the same complaint, and Eda Helman as a prospective tenant with a sharp-tongued awareness of the realities are all of them (not to forget the six future admirals in the Brazilian navy) contributors to the giddiest delight to be seen hereabouts since "You Can't Take It With You."

"Old Acquaintance"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 24, 1940

Jane Cowl and Peggy Wood Make Something of "Old Acquaintance"

"Old Acquaintance," comedy by John Van Druten. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Morocco Theatre, New York, Dec. 23, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

JANE COWL and Peggy Wood, neither of whom has had a chance to act a decent part on Broadway the last several seasons, got so much satisfaction from playing two good parts in John van Druten's "Old Acquaintance" at the Morocco Theatre last night that they kept at it pretty late.

Which cuts the time necessary to a full report of the proceedings in this early morning estimate. I have a feeling there will be time enough, however. There isn't a great deal to Mr. van Druten's comedy aside from its leading characters.

I also have a feeling that "Old Acquaintance" would not get far without the girls. Without them, that is, and the crowds of other girls they will attract to the theatre. For this is a woman's play if ever there was one.

Love on the Table

For two hours Jane and Peggy dissect love. This affair and that affair. Mostly Miss Cowl's. This marriage and that marriageable daughter. Both belonging to Miss Wood.

Poor Kent Smith, who is practically the only male in the cast, is battledored and shuttlecocked between them and the van Druten situations, which are definitely of the theatre, until he must feel a little resentful at times.

He is living with Jane in the first act, Jane

being a successful novelist, a shade on the intellectual side. He is forced to fall abruptly in love with Peggy's daughter in the second act. Peggy also being a novelist, but rather on the flighty side.

Daughter is just a healthy, restless girl who wants to go night clubbing, or meet a roue, or have an affair or something. Practically anything that Author van Druten can think of as possibly adding interest to his play.

He finally has her fall in love with the unpredictable Mr. Smith, which brings a touch of tears and an aching heart to Jane, and gives

"Old Acquaintance" a vaporish suggestion of drama.

The performances, however, are excellent. All of them. Miss Cowl is again in perfect form as the worldly wise, gently cynical, slyly humorous, always charming lady turning middle-aged gracefully.

Miss Wood, playing Jane's best friend over a span of years, is bright and chipper, gay and properly a little shallow, keeping as honestly in character as a good actress should, whatever temptations the competition may suggest.

At Their Best

I do not see how either could acquire very compelling convictions regarding the van Druten women. But they know their trade, and their women, as Aurio Lee, their director, has given them to know them. And they give a lot to the play.

Assisting is that fine little ingenue, the Adele Longmire who played Ann Rutledge to the Massey Lincoln. Her character, too, it seems to me, lies in more definitely with stage life than with real life, but she has several splendidly played scenes with Miss Cowl.

Mr. Smith is a good sport about the whole business. Whenever his scenes are convincing, he helps to keep them so. When they are wobbly he saves them from falling.

Richard Whorf has contributed two interiors, one warm and attractive for Miss Cowl's apartment, one forbidding and a little poisonous for Miss Wood's. Costuming is also significant, which women will also appreciate.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 24, 1940

Jane Cowl and Peggy Wood Acting in van Druten's Newest Comedy, 'Old Acquaintance'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE John van Druten is a gentle, sincere and understanding person, it is easy to understand how his newest comedy, "Old Acquaintance," acquires those attractive qualities. Returning to his best style of "The Distant Side" and "There's Always Juliet," he has spun a slight and gossamer fable about love and civilized New York people, and it was brilliantly acted at the Morocco last evening. For quality it is superb. Mr. van Druten writes with enviable grace, humor and compassion. What he has to say you recognize instinctively as unalloyed truth; he does not sacrifice his characters to dialogue or situation. For quantity "Old Acquaintance" is definitely on the skimpy side. He does not really fill his comedy with substance until the third act, and for two-thirds of the evening the subject is elusive and the movement almost imperceptible.

This column has such a high regard for Mr. Van Druten's abilities that it admits the worst about "Old Acquaintance" grudgingly. For there is a distinct pleasure in encountering on the stage the sort of people he has slipped into his comedy. The old acquaintances of the title are Katherine Markham, a brilliant American novelist whose few works are highly admired and parsimoniously bought, and Mildred Watson Drake, a popular American novelist whose many books have made her

rich. Although they are temperamentally unlike and in some respects hostile, their friendship goes back so many years that it can withstand almost any crisis.

The narrative explores a tangled love situation. Katherine Markham is in love with a young man ten years her junior and has almost persuaded herself to marry him. But while she is hesitating he falls impetuously in love with the daughter of Mildred Watson Drake. As a narrative it meanders inside some very broad margins of conversation. What it achieves from Mr. van Druten's point of view is a remarkably complete portrayal of characters. For that is where his finest talent lies—in revealing the generosity, pain or jealousies

of the people of the play. Under the placid surface of most of the story and beneath the ripple of the dialogue he tells the truth about three women; and having a forgiving nature of his own he does not beat down harshly on their weaknesses.

If the story is thin and the drama languid, that is not the fault of the actors. Under Aurio Lee's sagacious and painstaking direction, the performance confers great credit on the theatre. It is subtle, bright and knowing; it catches every impulse in Mr. van Druten's thought.

As the representatives of old acquaintance, Miss Cowl and Miss Wood give triumphant performances. Sometimes Miss Cowl has a smug attitude toward comedy, as though she had swallowed a flock of canaries, and she is swallowing a few in this comedy. But apart from that she plays with fullness and richness of emotion and technical virtuosity, reminding you constantly that acting is not only a trade but a fine art. In the past Miss Wood has frequently flirted with parts as if she were afraid that the audience might not notice her. But now she is giving the best performance of her career—honest, aware and lucidly projected.

At one time Kent Smith was a good actor burdened with a heavy-handed style of playing. But now there is no one to match him for fluidity of expression and for manliness and sincerity. As the daughter in her twenties, Adele Longmire has suddenly learned how to play a part with fire and breeding, and since she is personally enchanting the result is worth a holiday cheer or two. Richard Whorf, represented here in his capacity as scene designer, has sketched a Washington Square apartment and a Park Avenue drawing-room that mirror the moods of the comedy perfectly.

In the quality of the writing and acting "Old Acquaintance" represents the best work in our theatre. It is regretfully admitted at this point that the story Mr. van Druten is telling is frail and unsubstantial and scarcely worth the trouble every one has taken with it.

"Old Acquaintance"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 24, 1940

Jane Cowl, Peggy Wood Return in a Very Minor Comedy by John van Druten

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JANE COWL and Peggy Wood rode charmingly into the Morosco Theater last evening on a vehicle built for two by John van Druten. The ladies tossed nuances gayly between them and fenced delightfully with inflections. Miss Wood made a summons to the telephone an occasion for delighted laughter. Miss Cowl, reflectively deciding that the number of her lovers was not, for her, too many, deservedly brought down the house.

With these important matters settled, we may move on to Mr. van Druten's play, which is called "Old Acquaintance," the title being almost too apt. It is a small piece, sentimental and comic. It tells a story of two women novelists, one a serious artist and the other a tosser off of trifles for the circulating library trade. The good writer has a young lover; the prosperous one an even younger daughter. It is easy from there on to put one and one together.

I betray only the faintest of secrets in reporting that young lover and pretty girl are drawn together. When his previous attachment is divulged misunderstanding follows.

But the good novelist is gallant and young love will, we are assured, eventually find a way. All is gently comfortable in "Old Acquaintance." The writing is tender as well as fluent. Mr. van Druten's knack for discerning comment on human foibles is as sure as ever. He throws pebbles at the plot clichés of popular fiction from the brittle shelter of a glass house. His play is no more than a

'OLD ACQUAINTANCE'

A comedy in three acts by John van Druten; staged by Aurio Lee; settings by Richard Whorf, presented at the Morosco Theater on December 22, 1940; by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast: Katherine Markham.....Jane Cowl
Rudd Kendall.....Kent Smith
Deirdre Drake.....Adele Longmire
Sabrina.....Anna Franklin
Mildred Watson Drake.....Peggy Wood
Susan.....Edna West
Preston Drake.....Hunter Gardner

prettily told anecdote. But he gives Miss Cowl and Miss Wood something to act in.

He allows them, too, to reveal their versatility. Much of the play is delightful fencing, made witty more by the acting than by the lines; made witty, too, by such incidentals as set and costumes. Miss Cowl creates character out of little gestures and out of voice variations so minute as to be almost imperceptible. Miss Wood, playing with equally expert sureness, makes a brand-new character out of familiar stuffs. When these two are on the stage together, tossing the ball between them, there is nothing whatever the matter with "Old Acquaintance."

But the plot has to be worked out and for it other characters are required. The two important ones are admirably played by Kent Smith and Adele Longmire. Miss Longmire is particularly engaging. But there is no doubt that "Old Acquaintance" saga markedly when neither Miss Cowl nor Miss Wood is present. Vehicles falter when stars vanish. That is how you tell vehicles from plays.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 24, 1940

"Old Acquaintance" With Miss Cowl and Miss Wood

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN A BRUTALIZED world John van Druten remains a civilized man. When he is writing well, as he most definitely is in "Old Acquaintance," he can provide an evening of uncommon warmth. His approach to his subject may be leisurely. His last act in particular may talk itself to a curtain which just now is sadly overdue when it falls at the Morosco. But his perceptions are charming.

Mr. van Druten's planning is the result of a good craftsman's pride. He can remain witty in the statement of sympathy. His observations are often gay. Yet his characters do not fire them off as if they had Roman Candles stuck in their mouths as do those characters who have wise-cracks to deliver. His approach to the ridiculous is less spectacular than that. If it is quieter, it is because it is truer.

Although his waggish felicities are constant and ingratiating, Mr. van Druten is not afraid of emotion. He is wise enough to realize that sensibilities and a sense of humor are not incompatible. Gentle as are his touches, he can enjoy malice and expose it on its own terms. His major interest centers in his people. And his people in "Old Acquaintance" are to a large extent his plot. What they become involved in must more truly be described as a situation than a plot, because "plot" is too strong a word to be used in connection with a play in which the self-revelation of good

talk is not only more active than the action but provides it with its basis.

An Agreeable Evening

The way in which one lady novelist loses her much younger lover to the young daughter of an old friend who is also a lady novelist is the situation to which Mr. van Druten brings his wit, his tenderness, his technical ingenuity, and his amazing knowledge of the distaff side. Yet what is at all times of more interest than what happens in "Old Acquaintance" are the characters to whom it happens. The duel between the two lady novelists in temperament, endowment, and ambition is skillfully maneuvered. So, too, is the dual be-

tween the daughter and jealous mother she abandons. And so are the duels, fought in well observed terms, between the generations, and lovers who are about to part. They all show to what agreeable and subtle uses Mr. van Druten can put the genteel values of his observation in a comedy which claims pleasure rather than importance as its goal. These conflicts, so minor but so literate, in which the troops of good talk are on the whole so shrewdly deployed, indicate that Mr. van Druten is a dramatist who is no less attentive to the needs of actresses than he is knowing so far as the ways of women are concerned. Kent Smith may come off negatively as a lover. Hunter Gardner may not fare much better even as a divorced husband. But Adele Longmire, Peggy Wood, and Jane Cowl have excellent parts at their disposal which they act excellently.

Miss Cowl, Miss Wood

As a much loved, never-married, and fastidious authoress, Miss Cowl shines once again with all the well-known charm and deftness of her mannered playing. Not since "First Lady" has she been seen hereabouts to such shimmering advantage. Hers is a voice which, though rich and velvety, can speed a line to laughter. Her eyes can dance with humor. As always, too, her graceful hands hover above her lines like gulls flying out to meet a ship. As the writer of undistinguished successes Miss Wood gives a brilliant performance—comic, unsparing, vigilantly observed, and admirably projected. She captures to the full the silliness and cruel possessiveness of the woman she is playing. To do this she sours the sweetness which is usually hers, and thus contrives to meet the acidic needs of an unusually acid character. As Miss Wood's daughter, Miss Longmire emerges as another young actress to raise critical hopes this season. She has intensity, and plays with an honesty, both winning and incisive.

The truth is that "Old Acquaintance," as written, as acted, and sensitively directed by Aurio Lee, provides a pleasant evening, and will provide an even pleasant one when it has been relieved of some fifteen minutes of its present playing time.

"Old Acquaintance"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 24, 1940

Old Acquaintance Is Superbly Acted Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

JOHN VAN DRUTEN'S new comedy, *Old Acquaintance*, is so far above the average level of the season's plays, and it is so superbly acted that it seems ungrateful to examine it with too critical an eye. It gives us two lively, vivid portraits of lady novelists at work and play, and a deeply understanding study of a young girl who has reached the restless age. But after a breezy, refreshing first act, it settles down into an interminable discussion of the problems involved when an attractive spinster is discarded by her lover in favor of a younger woman.

I am not certain that Mr. van Druten's comedy solves this problem, even for so intelligent and wise a woman as his heroine, Katherine Markham, seems to be. To be sure, there is courage and self-sacrifice and a show of nobility in Miss Markham's surrender of the man to the lovely young daughter of her dearest friend. But if the man and the younger woman actually do marry—as seems likely at the curtain—a new problem arises. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that some day in the future the bride is going to address some angry remarks to her husband on the subject of his relations with Miss Markham and the whole business will end in scandal.

There is, however, if one forgets this theorizing, no fault in *Old Acquaintance*, from

the standpoint of entertainment, that could not be corrected by judicious cutting. The second and third acts lack the directness of the first because they are too talkative. There is too much conversation. Too much repetition. The pleasant quality of the new play is its insight into the minds of the two novelists. Miss Markham writes beautiful literature—the kind of books that deserve and win critical praise, but not much material reward. Her friend, Mildred Watson Drake, writes potboilers with stereotyped plots which become best sellers. Miss Markham is frank, direct and intellectually honest. Mrs. Drake (a divorcee) is shallow, an eternal actress, and a victim of

her own jealousies. And it is her own daughter who attracts and finally wins Miss Markham's love, just at the moment when Miss Markham has nearly decided to marry him herself.

Mr. van Druten takes rather too long to tell the story, although it must be said that throughout his dialogue there are suddenly delightful twists to the conversation and occasionally speeches containing such wit that the audience is aroused to appreciative bursts of laughter.

The performances of Miss Jane Cowl as Miss Markham, Miss Peggy Wood as Mrs. Drake and those of Kent Smith as the man in the case and Miss Adele Longmire as the younger girl did much to save the play from a complete decline into dullness.

Miss Cowl, whose mellow voice is so tuneful and persuasive, adds fine touches and tricks of personality to her characterization and she is, as always, a delight to watch and hear. Miss Wood, as the vain, selfish and unhappy Mrs. Drake, has never played more delightfully or with greater insight and artistry.

Mr. Smith was especially attractive in a role that called for light and quizzical treatment at the beginning and a display of deeper emotions at the end. In many respects I think it is the most finished performance of his career, and one outstanding for its restraint and dignity.

Adele Longmire (who used to be Raymond Massey Lincoln's Ann Rutledge) is the ingenue in this one. Since she is only 23 and she is here portraying a 19-year-old girl who is just beginning to discover the delights of the Stock Club, I suppose there is no reason why she shouldn't give an expert performance. At any rate, it is a delight to behold her evident insight into the strange operations of the youthful mind and to observe the ease with which she projects those qualities that make the younger generation so puzzling, so maddening and so wonderfully lovable.

Richard Whorf's settings were admirable.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 24, 1940

Lady Novelists

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN HIS new play Mr. van Druten examines with humor and insight the private lives of the lady novelists. His "*Old Acquaintance*" is not a drama of deep emotions or high excitement, but in its quiet and restrained fashion it manages to be human, likable and almost consistently interesting in a manner which makes up in intelligence and warmth for what it may conceivably lack in depth and forcefulness. A knowing and amusingly tolerant study of the lifelong if frequently interrupted friendship between two women writers, with particular accent on the sex life of the more dashing of the pair, the new work is better in its scenes of calm and understanding comment on literary women than it is in its more emotional episodes, but I think you will find it an entertaining and observant comedy. In its slightly feminine manner. In addition, it offers superior performances by Miss Jane Cowl, Miss Peggy Wood and that oncoming young actress, Miss Adele Longmire.

With friendly detachment Mr. van Druten is here studying the useful later days in the romantic existence of a good novelist named Katherine Markham. It seems that Miss Markham wrote novels that were admired by the critics, while her friend, Mrs. Mildred Watson Drake wrote books that attracted the sneers of the reviewers but the money of the paying readers. Miss Markham, it appears, had many

lovers and a lot of fun, while Mrs. Drake had scared away one husband and had never really enjoyed herself. Miss Markham was friendly, helpful and tolerant, while Mrs. Drake was catty, jealous and silly. Yet somehow or other they remained friends, in a manner of speaking. So far as it has a plot, "*Old Acquaintance*" has to do with the way in which Miss Markham has a younger lover snatched from her by Mrs. Drake's ingenue daughter, and how the event which once seemed likely to break up the old friendship had the eventual effect of cementing it.

As I have suggested, "*Old Acquaintance*" is at its best in its characterization and its observation, rather than in its not-too-stirring

emotions. The two women, for example, are written with shrewdness and understanding. Although one of them is a humorous, urbane and compassionate person and the other is a fool, the author is graciously compassionate about both of them, so that the foolish woman, despite all the feline mischief she causes, is in the end almost as sympathetic a figure as her more admirable friend. The daughter is pleasantly drawn, too, and Mr. van Druten's wry and smiling comments on the people and carryings-on among the more polite literary set are of considerable humorous value. There is, for example, a half a minute or so of dialogue on existence in Hollywood, which is considerably more amusing and far more pointed than all the things those four horrible plays about the cinema citadel ever had to tell us in their miserable careers. When it moves into drama the play is far less pointed, but it does keep its good sense and its tolerance.

When two such eminent ladies of the drama as Miss Cowl and Miss Wood get together in one play the chances are that a certain amount of chaos will reign. In the case of "*Old Acquaintance*," however, the acting of the two stars is smooth and unusually effective. Miss Cowl plays the more sympathetic of the authors with humor and understanding, combining her celebrated mannerisms with the part in skillful and satisfying fashion. Miss Wood, whose role is both more difficult and more showy, acts with such resourceful skill that her characterization becomes quite the finest thing she has done in the theater in many seasons. Here is a really rich comedy portrayal. Miss Longmire plays the daughter with such charm, directness and emotional understanding that she handsomely lives up to the pleasant things we all had thought of her when she appeared as Ann Rutledge in "*Abe Lincoln in Illinois*." The two men of the cast are satisfactorily played by Kent Smith and Hunter Gardner. "*Old Acquaintance*" is a pleasant play.

"Retreat to Pleasure"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 18, 1940

'Retreat to Pleasure,' a Slight Comedy, Is Offered at the Belasco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "Retreat to Pleasure," which opened last evening at the Belasco, Irwin Shaw tells a reasonably pleasant little anecdote about a girl who was loved by three men and ended up by marrying none of them. In passing, Mr. Shaw skims the surface of the world's tribulations and comments entertainingly enough on the minor foibles of the human breed. It is all most placid; a zephyr in a teacup.

His heroine is an animated girl who has been actress, newspaper reporter and WPA administrator in Ohio. Fleeing the responsibilities of the latter post, she returns to New York and love assails her from all directions. A windy young artist orates for her benefit, a solid business man woos her solemnly and a playboy wistfully pursues. When she goes to Florida in the second act she encounters an amusing prize fighter, a business man and his "niece," a reflective bartender, a comic lady drunk and a bathing girl with a French poodle. She is wooed continuously.

The rest of the play is devoted to the remarks of the artist, to whom all the characters listen intently and by whom many lives are changed. About this young man, played as charmingly as possible by Leif Erickson and named Peter Flower, Mr. Shaw

and I must agree to differ. Mr. Shaw evidently regards him as the blossom of modern youth—a philosophical gypsy, carrying the truth like a torch. I, on the other hand, reluctantly consider him a loquacious bore, too callow for this modern world and maybe even too callow for the theater.

This view may reflect mere prejudice, but it obviously affects one's judgment of "Retreat to Pleasure." Even for those who like Mr. Flower, Mr. Shaw's play may well seem a static little comedy, entertaining chiefly because of its humorously conceived side

'RETREAT TO PLEASURE'

A comedy in three acts by Irwin Shaw; directed by Harold Clurman; settings by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Paul duPont; presented at the Belasco Theater on December 17, 1940, by the Group Theater. The cast:

Frances Galligan.....	Helen Ford
Peter Flower.....	Leif Erickson
Chester Stack.....	John Emery
Lee Tatnall.....	Hume Cronyn
Norah Galligan.....	Edith Atwater
Mr. Ordway.....	Fred Stewart
Franklin Diederich.....	Art Smith
Lenore Trilling.....	Florence Sundstrom
Husband.....	Joseph F. Foley
Wife.....	Marie Adels
Eugene Makofske.....	George Matthews
Girl in Bathing Suit.....	Barbara Beech
Irishman Tatnall.....	Dorothy Fatten
Lady at the Bar.....	Ruth Nelson
Bartender.....	John McGovern

issues. (The fighter is fun, for example, and the "niece" is an amusing little baggage until weltchmerz overcomes her.) Those annoyed by Mr. Flower may have some rather loud moments and sympathize strongly with the character who just wades out into the ocean, away from everything and, particularly, away from Mr. Flower.

Hume Cronyn, playing the smallest of the lady's admirers, gives a sharp, droll performance and pretty much runs away with the play. Helen Ford, Fred Stewart, George Matthews and Art Smith and Ruth Nelson are beset in small parts: John Emery straightforward and honest in a larger one. Mr. Erickson is as charming as a man can well be under circumstances which seem to me adverse, and Miss Edith Atwater, as the much sought lady, is pleasant to look at and a graceful listener. She has to listen a lot.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 18, 1940

Retreat to Pleasure Full of Airy, Good Humor

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

YOU will be surprised to learn, I am sure, that Irwin Shaw apparently has deserted the proletarian drama to gambol for a while in the pleasanter pastures of light comedy. True, there is in his *Retreat to Pleasure*, the new Group Theater production at the Belasco, some banter about the present sorry state of the world. There is also some questioning by the younger generation about the deeper purpose of life. But these occasionally unhappy ponderings give way, as a general rule, to the more exciting pursuit of an elusive female.

Retreat to Pleasure, in other words, is totally different from anything Mr. Shaw has shown us before. It is light, airy, full of persiflage and good humor—a whimsical study of a group of personalities which, if not deeply etched, are amusingly drawn. Mr. Shaw's composition is a square rather than a triangle. Three males compete for the one desirable woman. That all three of them eventually decide that the woman is not paramount desire, and that the curtain falls with the lady destined for continuing spinsterhood, provides a certain dramatic novelty, although I simply cannot believe that any man of sound mind could turn down anyone so lovely as Edith Atwater.

The first of these suitors is Peter Flower, an agreeable vagabond with no discernible

purpose in life other than to upset the plans of any other man who aspires to wed Norah Galligan (Miss Atwater). The second is a manufacturer of valves who has a New England conscience—an economic royalist. The third is a playboy to whom the most important event of his life (or at least the only thing he remembers of his entire career) is the Follies of 1923.

Miss Galligan, who wants to marry because she is tired out from working in a relief bureau, rather than because she is actually in love with anybody, flees to Florida with the manufacturer and is pursued by the extra males, Peter Flower, strictly through his persuasive conversational powers, inspires the

valve man to give up his girl, retire from a business that may soon be turned into a munitions plant and go in for politics. He persuades the playboy that his suit has been wasted. He induces Norah to marry him. And then, at the last moment, lets her down with the crushing announcement that he couldn't bear being cooped up in a little house with a woman. He wants, it seems, to see more of life before he settles down.

There is much pleasant chatter throughout the play, but it must be admitted that an idea that was not too robust to begin with is bound to grow a little tedious when it is drawn through three acts.

The acting, however, in great measure compensated for the lightness of the theme. Miss Atwater, as I have indicated, is one for whom not three men but hundreds should contend. Her performance was a sure and vivid as it was when she was the long-suffering secretary to the Man Who Came to Dinner.

Leif Erickson, as Peter Flower, played exuberantly and with evident enjoyment of a role that contains some difficulties. He avoided, for one thing, the danger of making Peter Flower's interference with the lives of other people an officious or even annoying trait. It cannot be easy to steal another man's girl and make him like it (and make the audience like it into the bargain), but he does it successfully.

Hume Cronyn, as the valve maker, does a human, persuasive, and intelligent piece of work, his best, I think, in several years. John Emery, the playboy, gives the part an air of unsophisticated humor that is very engaging. In the lesser roles, Helen Ford gave an amusing portrayal of a flighty mother, George Matthews was excellent as a dim-witted prize-fighter (rough, but oh, so gentle!) and Florence Sundstrom was effective as a sugar daddy's sugar-baby. Art Smith gave a fine performance in the role of a cheap whisky manufacturer, and the remainder of the cast filled in admirably. Harold Clurman directed a performance that flowed smoothly.

"Retreat to Pleasure"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 18, 1940

Irwin Shaw

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IRWIN SHAW is an excellent short-story writer, even in his plays. All of his dramas have striking minor characters, effective incidental episodes and fine bits of narrative, and most of them are inclined to be considerably more effective in their parts than as a whole. This characteristic trait of his is particularly in evidence in "Retreat to Pleasure," which is offered by the Group Theater as its first production of the season. Here again a set of lively characters, admirable minor incidents, good bits of narrative, a sense of humor and some interesting writing are nullified by the unfortunate fact that the core of the play is weak and ineffective. A semi-comic tale of love and frustration, with interpolated suggestions of social import, "Retreat to Pleasure" leaves Mr. Shaw about where it found him.

This is the story of Norah Galligan, good-looking, restless and twenty-eight, who would be a relief administrator in one of the Ohio districts. Emotionally upset by the thought that a signature of hers on a government document might throw hundreds of men out of work, she returns to New York and is about to forget it all in a tour of the night clubs with a young man-about-town when back into her life dashes a romantic vagabond who had deserted her some years before. A third suitor of hers is a confused and harassed manufacturer from Ohio, who is upset by the

stirrings of his social conscience. Well, Norah goes off to Florida with him and the other men pursue her and there is considerable confusion and talk of one sort and another until in the end nobody gets her at all. But they have talked things out quite a bit and Mr. Shaw obviously feels that something has been decided by their contemplations.

The chief trouble with all this is that the romantic vagabond, with his self-conscious picturesqueness is, despite the author's obvious admiration, an excessively boring and unpleasant fellow. Apparently his bold, free, inquiring spirit is supposed to supply cleansing liberation of soul to all who are subjected to it, but for me it provided only irritation.

The man-about-town, who finds that his life has been a hollow one, has but a faint connection with the central narrative, and the heroine herself hardly seems worth the trouble she causes every one. On the other hand, the wistful manufacturer from Ohio is not only an engaging but an entirely believable and interesting figure, while such minor persons of the story as a punch-drunk prizefighter, the heroine's bibulous mother, an unhappy girl friend of a whisky distiller and the whisky man, are admirably drawn. It is when they are holding the stage, not when the plot and the discussions of the world's plight are the center of things, that "Retreat to Pleasure" is worth listening to.

Mr. Shaw has a gift for sharp comedy which serves him happily at times, but the humor, like the other virtues of the new play, is too intermittent for satisfaction. The playing, however, is in most cases excellent. The role of the picturesque wanderer is a bit too much for Lelf Erickson; but the blame for this goes almost entirely to the playwright. Miss Edith Atwater is cool, handsome and believable as the distraught relief worker and John Emery is effective in the somewhat vague part of the man-about-town. By far the finest performance, though, is that of Hume Cronyn as the wistful manufacturer. Mr. Cronyn, who is invariably a superior actor, plays what is the most interesting character of the work with a sensitive skill and understanding of an unusual order. In smaller roles, George Matthews is excellent as the mother, Miss Florence Sundstrom as the distiller's girl, Art Smith as the whisky man and Fred Stewart as a government employee of some sort are excellent. So is Donald Oenslager's Florida setting. But if there is a triumph in "Retreat to Pleasure" it belongs to Mr. Cronyn.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 18, 1940

Irwin Shaw's 'Retreat to Pleasure' Acted Under Auspices of Group Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IRWIN SHAW has some droll notions in mind. In a town that has become tone deaf from listening too long to wisecracks it is hard to make people listen to drolleries without convincing them that they are bored. Mr. Shaw has not made the situation any easier by writing an inconclusive and meandering play. "Retreat to Pleasure," he calls it. It was put on at the Belasco last evening as a Group Theatre production. Taking a handful of bewildered moderns, Mr. Shaw has wound them up in a skein of humorous yarn, unwound them amusingly, and then left them at loose ends.

Since Edith Atwater is playing the central part with magnetic loveliness and the casual skill of a full-fledged leading lady, it would be a great thing for the nation if Mr. Shaw could come right out and say something decisive with a bang. Hume Cronyn and Lelf Erickson are giving excellent performances also. Nearly everything about "Retreat to Pleasure" is ripe for a good comedy—literate writing, with the humor bouncing off at odd angles, fresh and attractive characters, some good speculations about the mental climate of this period, beguiling acting. Nearly everything is ready except Mr. Shaw, who retreats from pleasure through most of the third act.

In point of fact, the comedy is chiefly concerned with Norah Galligan and her three

suitors. Norah is a spirited, cultivated young girl who has just been managing government relief in an Ohio county. Having rebelled against government orders, she hurries to New York to blow off some steam. A well-to-do New Englander, now manufacturing valves in Ohio, wants very much to reform his Yankee past and marry her. An amiable New York rounder wants to marry her and settle down. What confuses her most is the passionate eloquence of a left-wing vagabond who is just her sort, talks brilliantly but shies away from permanent alliances.

Probably there is something symbolic to Mr. Shaw in this fellow who knows everything, understands everybody, foresees everyone's future, is prepared for and convinced of the worst and is unable to make up his

mind to one course of action. But the effect of proposing him as the dominant character in a narrative is to leave the play without a sense of direction. And for purposes of theatregoing the impression "Retreat to Pleasure" leaves is that of a comedy brilliantly written in subordinate details and bungled in the major outlines of a story. Mr. Shaw is a gifted writer of dialogue. It rises spontaneously out of some interesting and recognizable characters. Light-footed and giddy-minded, it is the drollest writing of the season. If it is fascinating to listen to in the theatre, perhaps it has also fascinated Mr. Shaw a little and kept his mind off some of the primitive necessities of play-making.

Confronted with a capricious play, Harold Clurman has not directed it with much grace or finesse. The accent of the performance is a literal one. In view of the quality of the individual performances, the awkwardness of the whole performance is hard to explain. After playing minor parts for some time, Miss Atwater now translates a major part into something very exciting to see. As the introspective manufacturer, Mr. Cronyn is giving his keenest performance; and Mr. Erickson, who has shambled handsomely through several parts these past few years, has suddenly come to attention, and is playing the romantic vagabond with considerable force. These three manage to stand several of Mr. Shaw's discursive scenes very patly on their heads.

John Emery, Art Smith, Florence Sundstrom and George Matthews contribute some amusing ideas of character to the performance, and so does Helen Ford when she is not feeling kittenish. With a New York apartment and a Miami Beach to play with, Donald Oenslager has turned up to stand two settings that are an open invitation to pleasure. It would not be difficult to enjoy everything about the play, whether it is Mr. Shaw did not retreat from pleasure in the third act.

"Retreat to Pleasure"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 18, 1940

Three Men and a Girl And Nobody Happy in "Retreat"

"Retreat to Pleasure," comedy by Irwin Shaw. Produced by The Group Theatre at the Belasco Theatre, New York, Dec. 17, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IT APPEARS to be Irwin Shaw's conviction that nobody is happy in this cockeyed world, nor likely to be if he continues to follow present-day conclusions.

In "Retreat to Pleasure," at the Belasco, he poses the case of three men—a rich idler, a rich heir to industry, a wasted idealist—all three of whom believe that if they could marry Edith Atwater they would immediately solve the problem of living.

But attractive as Miss Atwater unquestionably is, pictorially, and as active as is her unformed and groping mind, it is finally proved that she is not the answer to any one of the three problems.

And so Mr. Shaw, like an honest dramatist but a poor showman, runs out on his own quiz and lets his audience decide for itself.

It isn't wise to beg the question in the theatre. A dramatist should not only have convictions, but stand up for them.

Uncertain Quantities

Neither is it wise to waste convictions on people incapable of supporting them, or even absorbing them. None of these play folk seems real.

Take Lelf Erickson, who is evidently Mr. Shaw's ideal, being a curious combination of

fiery radical and beaten crusader—even he is not sure of what he expects of the world or how to work for it.

He knows that present systems are wrong, and that the men who practice them are pretty unhappy, but the slow processes of evolution seem to be his only hope for the future. Which, dramatically, is a weak out.

Miss Atwater, as completely as I could understand her character, was a pretty social worker who was a minor executive for WPA in Ohio the time 10,000 government dependents were taken off the rolls.

This so unsettled her thought that she was a pushover for a variety of emotions. She

thought of marrying a sincere but puzzled manufacturer of valves. She considered playing around with a mooned playboy. And she could not quite forget the strong young socialist with whom she used to drink cocktails, listen to Tchaikowsky and discuss the fate of the world.

Off to Miami

So she ups and runs away to Florida with the industrialist to ponder and make up her mind. No good. The playboy and the socialist (who had won a thousand dollars playing poker in a firehouse; imagine!) followed her and the footless discussion started all over again.

Well, it is a hapdsome Donald Oenslager production, anyway. And nicely cast. Miss Atwater, as intimated, is beautiful to look upon and, so far as her author permits, interesting to listen to. A good actress, honestly ambitious and well favored.

Mr. Erickson also possesses the virtues of earnestness and a determination to give any role, especially any role of social significance, the best he has to give.

Supporting these two are that excellent character actor, Hume Cronyn, playing the puzzled industrialist, and the upstanding and good looking John Emery as the playboy.

There are also a variety of short parts into which good actors also have been slipped—Helen Ford, playing an indefinitely characterized mother to the heroine; Florence Sundstrom, Dorothy Patten, Fred Stewart, Ruth Nelson and Art Smith, who are about the only members of the old Group Theatre troupe to show.

Nice audience, and a good deal of giggling.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 18, 1940

Irwin Shaw's "Retreat To Pleasure" Staged

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT IS with a heavy heart that one is forced to report how seldom Irwin Shaw's "Retreat to Pleasure" succeeds in becoming the comedy which it aims at being.

To make matters worse, there are many agreeable people in the cast. Edith Atwater, Lelf Erickson, John Emery, Hume Cronyn, Helen Ford, and George Matthews are all of them ingratiating performers. Not only does one want to like them but they make liking easy. Yet the stubborn fact remains that in the Group Theatre's first production of the winter they are all of them no more than agreeable passengers, imprisoned in a vehicle which chugs its way to an occasional laugh without ever hitting on more than one cylinder, and often goes into reverse.

Mr. Shaw—the Group's Mr. Shaw—is a promising playwright of whom much is, and will be, expected. Although "Siege," his drama about the Spanish War, had, like most nightmares, beat be forgotten, Mr. Shaw's "Bury the Dead" has burned its way into remembrance. It was a diatribe against battle which showed the wounding indignation he can state in dramatic terms. "The Gentle

People," the somewhat confusing allegory with which he followed this, proved, especially in its unforgettable scene in a steam bath, the humor he commands. But Mr. Shaw as the author of a comedy which does not know where it is going or why it has gone where it goes, is another matter. And this, unfortunately, is the Mr. Shaw who is heard from in "Retreat to Pleasure."

The troubles of the world—public and priv-

ate—hover vulture-wise over the few genuinely gay moments of his latest script. The beat of their distant wings provides the evening with its one authentic, if invisible, interest. If these problems refuse ever to light it is because they are vultures that have been misled. They can find nothing on which to feed off the carrion of the plot over which they have been tempted to foregather.

Retreat From Pleasure

Three men in hot pursuit of a girl from New York to the unrealities of Florida are Mr. Shaw's concern. Nor are matters helped because the girl is a Vassar graduate, with an awakened social conscience, and the men are a bouncer, a bantam capitalist, and a young liberal who is the most aggressive Mr. Fix-it to be seen hereabouts since Luka first wandered into "The Lower Depths."

The three men and the girl all sink ultimately in the leaky boat of Mr. Shaw's playwrighting in spite of the fact that he spends the evening snatching life-belts out of their hands. Moreover in the third act even an optimistic audience goes down for the third time.

Miss Atwater is charming. Mr. Erickson is admirable. Mr. Cronyn demonstrates once again how excellent an actor he is. Mr. Emery contributes a helpful characterization. Miss Ford makes much of nothing. And Mr. Oenslager's settings are designed to house a worthy play. But it is only in the extraneous prize-fighter, both as performed by Mr. Matthews and as written by Mr. Shaw, that the comedy declares a real dividend. The rest of it is one long promissory note, always falling due and never being met.

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 27, 1940

Miss Barrymore Splendid in The Corn Is Green

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ETHEL BARRYMORE has come to the rescue of Broadway in a comedy of Welsh country life that is so charming and so well acted that it makes one forget, if not forgive, all the futile and tawdry little plays that have preceded it during this sorry season.

The Corn Is Green is not of world-shaking significance. But it has a definite beauty, a kindly atmosphere and an attitude toward the human race that is refreshing and hopeful. It is, in short, a relief from the dispiriting experiences of the last eight weeks.

Although this play, by Emyln Williams, deals with conditions in a Welsh mining town of some 40 years ago, it points unmistakably to problems that are common to all times and all countries. And if it seems to say that the cure for our social and economic evils is simply education and more education, who can quarrel with such obvious reasoning? The point is that *The Corn Is Green* presents this thesis so delightfully and logically and realistically that the lesson—a primer lesson, if you will—is not only convincing but pleasant to absorb.

Miss Barrymore, who puts on and takes off decades as easily as changing a gown, now becomes a middle-aged spinster who has taken upon herself the almost impossible task of bringing the light of education to a community wallowing in ignorance. In the three years through which the action of the play

progresses, she is called upon to battle a pompous and thick-witted squire, a suspicious and unwilling citizenry, and certain treachery within her own household. In the end she succeeds in raising out of the muck of the mines a young man who, it is promised, may some day become a great, liberal statesman and perhaps the savior of England.

The fact that the scene of this conflict is laid in Wales was sufficient to turn my thoughts, at various intervals, to Lloyd George, who also came from humble beginnings in that region—and to wonder whether Miss Barrymore's protegee in the story will one day forsake his liberalism and demand the hanging of some future Kaiser. But let that pass, for the thought is too pessimistic to inject in such a hopeful situation as Mr. Williams' play leaves us all.

Little more can be said of Miss Barrymore's playing of this fine character, Miss Moffatt, than has already been said of her a hundred times over. It is not, despite the nobility of purpose behind it, a particularly warm character. That is, there is no visible personal affection behind her experiment with the young coal miner whom she raises above ground and sends to Oxford. It is, until the very last, a clinical experiment, motivated by an academic, though generous, desire to "do something" for mankind. Miss Barrymore's interest is detached and impersonal. She is a severe task-mistress, a dictator, a dominant female. And that is the way she enacts the role. I think she has captured the very essence of the woman and to do so she had to stifle some of the more endearing Barrymore mannerisms without quite extinguishing her always sparkling sense of humor. In other words, a splendid performance because it is so true to character.

The acting throughout is, in fact, a constant delight, and Herman Shumlin is to be complimented not only upon the casting but on his direction. Thelma Schnee, whose progress I have noted from time to time in the summer theaters, is now entitled to full recognition as one of the most versatile and adept of our younger actresses, and her portrayal of the scheming little trollop who nearly wrecks the Great Lady's plans is easily one of the outstanding characterizations of the year.

Edmond Breon gave a remarkably attractive performance of the blasted squire, and Rosalind Ivan's conception of a reformed pick-pocket and proud mother of the youthful seductress was richly comic. Rhys Williams falls naturally into the part of the stuffy Welsh schoolmaster, and played with his usual sure skill.

Finally, after some three years in which I have constantly advised young Richard Waring that his playing was too stylized and melodramatic to suit my taste, my hat is off to him for a performance that was vivid, compelling and as real as life itself. I do not see how, in the character of the subject of Miss Barrymore's experiment, his acting could be bettered, and I am glad to praise him.

By all means go and see *The Corn Is Green*.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 27, 1940

"The Corn Is Green" Brings Joy to E. Barrymore and Others

"The Corn Is Green," drama by Emyln Williams. Produced by Herman Shumlin at the National Theatre, New York, Nov. 26, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE news from the National Theatre this morning is rather on the jubilant side. Emyln Williams' "*The Corn Is Green*," which brought Ethel Barrymore back to town last night, is the best new play of a backward season.

So happy was the audience over both the good luck of a favorite first lady and the discovery of a good drama, that it remained after the play, a statistical scout has just phoned, to ring up fourteen curtain calls, eight of them in honor of Miss Barrymore solo.

Which is certainly cheering. And yet all that Mr. Williams has sent us is a simple story of honest folk confronted by honest problems. A serving of wholesome Welsh home-made bread can prove pretty satisfying when you are good and hungry.

Human Story

In "*The Corn Is Green*" Miss Barrymore is playing an English spinster, an intellectual with a university degree and an alert intelligence that she is tired of wasting. Inheriting a small house in a coal mining center of Wales, she goes there to live and finally to open a school for the children of the miners, a majority of whom can neither read nor write.

Among her pupils, and the one inspiration

that helps her overcome all the hurdles, including a complacent squire who doesn't believe in educating the poor and lowly, is a lad of 15 with some thirst for knowledge. This boy she carries through to an Oxford scholarship, though the carrying includes the buying off of the kitchen maid he has seduced and the adoption of the baby that is the unhappy outcome of that meeting.

This is not a particularly stirring adventure, nor one deeply moving emotionally. And yet it is so honestly human in its writing and so satisfying in its playing that there is just cause for last night's enthusiasm.

It gives Miss Barrymore the best part she has had for several seasons. It presents her as frankly, though, in appearance, unbelievably middle aged, and provides a few of those scenes that she plays so effectively through tears.

Good Support

It is one of those Barrymore parts in which there are glints of humor and one in which she can toss her blonde head defiantly and read her lessons to the opposition with fire and finality.

It provides her, too, with an exceptionally well selected cast of helpers, including that fine young juvenile, Richard Waring, who last season won praise but only a few weeks work playing the unhappy John Wilkes Booth in "*The Man Who Killed Lincoln*."

He is a sturdy young Welshman, a defiant rebel on occasion, an inarticulate but grateful genius and a likable problem child consistently rolled into one characterization.

Edmond Breon has come over from England to play the Squire. He does so with modest but honest realism. Rosalind Ivan gives character and humor to an amusing housekeeper. Thelma Schnee plays the wayward maid with artful enthusiasm. Rhys Williams, being Welsh, helped Herman Shumlin with the direction.

He also plays a stolid helper with character touches, and Mildred Dunnock helpfully adds a skittish spinster to the group.

"*The Corn Is Green*" should carry Miss Barrymore well into the Spring. It gives a happy lift to Broadway's scanty list of worthwhile plays.

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 27, 1940

'The Corn Is Green,' With Ethel Barrymore, Opens at the National Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening brought a play worth talking about. Emlyn Williams' "The Corn Is Green," which opened at the National with Miss Ethel Barrymore as its star, is emotionally mature and moving. It tells simply, with dignity and compassion, a story worth telling. It gives the audience something to think and feel about and the actors something to act about. The season, overnight, has come of age.

The story Mr. Williams tells is uncomplicated—probably it is not quite complicated enough. It is the story of a middle-aged spinster who went to a remote

Welsh village in the latter part of the last century with a foolish, gallant dream of teaching boys and girls, and their fathers and mothers, to read and write. She found ignorance as black as the mine galleries in which the boys worked from the age of 12, and prejudice and stupidity. And not much of what she did had any lasting value.

But she found one boy whose mind was original and alive and she fought against his ignorance, and his homesickness for the old, easy ways and she got him into Oxford on a scholarship. As Mr. Williams writes the story, that seems a great thing. He makes you believe, while he tells the story, in human dignity and in the importance of the individual and any words which foster that belief are nowadays of peculiar value. Whatever faults "The Corn Is Green" has are of minor importance by comparison.

The play suffers chiefly, especially in the

second act, from lack of conflict. Exciting as a whole, the drama is not always exciting in detail, and that is one of the kinds of excitement the theater needs. All that interrupts the salvation of Morgan Evans is a casual affair with a servant's daughter, and the teacher handles that briskly, if not without personal inconvenience. She has to adopt the baby to get Morgan free from this entanglement. This represents dramatic struggle at close to the irreducible minimum: possibly a little below it. But sharply drawn, varied minor characters act as condiments to the solid main dish, and fine acting spices it further.

Miss Barrymore herself is, to put a word to it, magnificent. The human emotions of the part flow through her and are augmented. At the end when, as the teacher, she finally frees

'THE CORN IS GREEN'

A play in three acts by Emlyn Williams; directed by Herman Shumlin; setting by Howard Bay; costumes by Ernest Schrappe; presented by Mr. Shumlin at the National Theater on November 26, 1940. The cast:

John Gorenwy Jones	 Rhys Williams
Miss Ronberry	 Mildred Duncock
Idwal Morris	 Charles S. Fursell
Sarah Pugh	 Gwyneth Hughes
A Groom	 George Bleasdale
The Squire	 Edmond Breen
Mrs. Watty	 Rosalind Ivan
Bessie Watty	 Ethel Barrymore
Miss Moffat	 Thomas Lyons
Robbarr Robbarr	 Richard Waring
Morgan Evans	 Kenneth Clarke
Glyn Thomas	 Merritt O'Duel
John Owen	 Terence Morgan
Will Hughes	 Sayre Crawley
Old Tom	 Julia Knox
Boys, Girls and Parents	 Amelia Romano, Betty Conibear, Rosalind Carter, Harla Normann, Joseph McInerney, Marcel Dill, Gwilym Williams, Tommy Dix.

the boy and sends him out into the world her playing has amazing depth and is as satisfyingly moving. As the boy, Richard Waring plays throughout with great perception and vitality.

Miss Thelma Schnee, who has been more or less hidden to date—no doubt under a bushel—is impertinent and funny and uncommonly vivid as the errant Bessie, who momentarily distracts Morgan from his proper path. Edmond Breen plays the part of an expansive, foolish equivocal, with just the correct bustling affability and Rhys Williams is admirable as an upright Welshman. Mildred Duncock plays a fluttery spinster delightfully and to hear Rosalind Ivan, as Bessie's mother, announce that she couldn't quite take to her daughter is an experience not to be missed. I shouldn't miss any part of "The Corn Is Green" if I were you. It is drama for grownups.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 27, 1940

Miss Barrymore Triumphs in "The Corn Is Green"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

FOR all I know last night's audience at the National may still be cheering. Certainly the bravos which filled the air after the fall of the final curtain were deafening and prolonged. Moreover, there was every good reason for them. Because in Emlyn Williams' "The Corn Is Green" Ethel Barrymore, the true and constant embodiment of the traditions of a great stage family, gives the finest, most thoughtful, and most concentrated performance she has given in many years.

Mr. Williams' play, in which he and Dame Sybil Thorndike scored a genuine success in London, is an agreeable affair. Its story of an English school teacher who invades the mining district of Wales to win a scholarship at Oxford for her brightest pupil, and ends up by adopting his illegitimate child, is as pleasantly told as it is slight.

Considered as a sociological tract, it may be as weighty as a novel written by William J. Locke or Frances Hodgson Burnett. But in spite of its slightness—in spite, too, of its being overlong—its mixture of sugar and coal dust, of schoolroom and alumnus, of the higher learning and Pollyanna, proves to be almost steadfastly ingratiating.

A final indication of its skill both in establishing character and in advancing a slim

story with suspense, is that playgoers are forced to await the news of its hero's winning or losing his Oxford scholarship with as much interest as if they themselves were concerned.

It is Miss Barrymore as the school marm, and a stageful of ably drawn and ably acted secondary village characters, who manage to turn the vegetable marrow of such a plot into good old roast beef. Miss Barrymore brings all her familiar magic—and a new intensity—to her playing of the zealous Miss Moffat.

Entering with a bicycle in hand, and wearing a straw hat, a shirt waist and skirt, she looks like a Gibson girl in a world that has grown up and had its conscience awakened—at least in some countries. Her face is warm with a radiance uniquely her own. Her classic features retain their distinguished beauty. And her voice throbs with those melodies her throat alone has always been able to release. But where in the past Miss Barrymore has often been content to be Miss Barrymore and nothing more (as if that were not impressive enough of itself, regardless of the wigs and make-ups she has been asked to put on), in "The Corn Is Green" she shows freshly-found capacities as an actress. She listens vigilantly. Her mind is always upon what is happening. She turns school marm as gladly as Elias Perry teaches. All her latent nobility is mobilized, protected by the sheer sunshine of her humor, and given full advantage of her thinking and her charm.

Nor is Miss Barrymore alone in making the production a rewarding one. Mr. Shumlin's direction is at all times considerate of the virtues of the text. Richard Waring, in Mr. Williams' part of the young miner who qualifies for Oxford, gives a performance eloquent in its reticence. Edmond Breen excellently suggests the mingled stupidity, goodness, and arrogance of the local Squire. Thelma Schnee is almost unbearably real as the slut who threatens to stand in the way of the young miner's progress. Rosalind Ivan, as the slut's reformed mother, proves herself a capable character actress. And Rhys Williams acquits himself with unusual credit as a Welshman turned teacher in Miss Barrymore's improvised classrooms.

All in all the evening is a highly satisfactory one. It achieves its desired effects without diabolic sweetness and with much humor. Its characters are pungently observed, its slight, though pleasant story, takes on the full interest and persuasion which a commendable production and Miss Barrymore at her glowing best are able to give to it.

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 27, 1940

Ethel Barrymore in the American Version of Emyln Williams's 'The Corn Is Green'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WITH the first real snow of late Autumn comes the first real play of the season. It is "The Corn Is Green," and it was superlatively well played at the National last evening with Ethel Barrymore at the peak of her talents. A play of Welsh life, it is the work of Emyln Williams, the young British actor who appeared here four years ago in "Night Must Fall," a macabre thriller of which he was also author. Almost a year before the war broke out Mr. Williams played in the original performance of "The Corn Is Green," vastly to every one's satisfaction; and since the play means a good deal to him personally, he had hoped to act it here and supervise the performance.

As things have turned out, he need have few regrets. For Herman Shumlin has staged it with complete respect for the beauty and exaltation of a remarkable drama. There are many things for which to be devoutly thankful this morning. Not the least of them is the fact that theatre has been restored to its high estate.

Mr. Williams's theme goes straight to the heart of a glorious topic. "The Corn Is Green" shows how light can be brought into minds of rude and ignorant people. Since the story is to some extent a story of Mr. Williams's personal experience, he goes about telling it with simplicity and affection. Into a small village on a remote Welsh countryside comes a restless female with a little money of her own and a mission. She wants to educate the

boys who normally go into the mines when they are 12 years old.

One of the boys turns out to have extraordinary talents as a writer. When she reads his first composition she is astonished by the imagination it discloses. She is also exhilarated, for the chance of pushing an ignorant lad over the wall into a civilized life that he can help to enrich is more than she had dared to hope for. And "The Corn Is Green" is the story of how, by faith, resolution and generosity, she passes the flame of enlightenment on to a hand that will carry it further.

Since this is, at least in part, a true story that probably represents a debt Mr. Williams can never pay, he tells it with extraordinary humanity. His characters are glowing members of the human race—some of them comic, one of them supercilious, one of them slattern-

ly, another dour but aspiring. Representing all kinds of pride, vanity, rebellion, coarseness, stubbornness and goodwill, they make an uncommonly attractive lot. And Mr. Williams keeps them moving in and out of his drama with intimate understanding. But his great character is modestly heroic—the teacher, Miss Moffat, the woman with a light in her mind. Aggressive and truculent in the opening scenes, she grows in grace and perception as the drama moves. What is pride and assurance in the first act becomes a complete surrender in the end to a cause that has overwhelmed her and become much greater than she was when she began.

As things go in the theatre, this is a great part, and as things are going in the theatre just now, Miss Barrymore plays it magnificently. After a long round of mediocre parts, she knows that something of rare quality has come her way and she has risen nobly to the occasion. She plays it forcefully, but she also plays it with deep compassion, and from now on she can wear Miss Moffat as a jewel in her crown.

As a director, Mr. Shumlin is a painstaking workman. He has cast the drama with great insight and directed it with superb skill. All the actors appear at their best, if not a little better. Richard Waring has never played so well; as the central boy in the story, he brings the character into shape with sharp definition. Thelma Schnee gives a resourceful, rounded performance as the troll. Rosalind Ivan is vigorously amusing as a housekeeper with religious notions. Mildred Dunnock is excellent as a timid spinster. As a Welsh clerk of studious inclinations, Rhys Williams adds one more to a lengthening list of admirable characterizations, and Edmond Breon catches all the pomposity and geniality of the squire.

All the action occurs within a savory old living room that Howard Bay has designed with homely appreciation. Everything about "The Corn Is Green" reawakens enthusiasm for the theatre. For Mr. Williams has written a play of devotion and wisdom, and the people who have put it on the stage share his respect for the human truth it represents.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 27, 1940

Teacher and Pupil

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS BARRYMORE has finally got herself a play of quality, and the results are what we had all anticipated. "The Corn Is Green," which is too good a drama to be described as a "vehicle," is the season's first new serious work of any stature, an earnest and dramatic study of a budding young Welsh genius and his understanding teacher, given solidity, force and remarkable interest by the humor and the keen insight into character that have gone into the writing. The work of the excellent English actor named Emyln Williams, the play was a great success in London until the siege of London brought it to a close, and it seems only fitting and proper that the first important new drama of the theatrical year should come to us from the British Isles. If it were only for the opportunity that it offers Miss Barrymore, "The Corn Is Green" would be welcome. But in its own right it is to be greeted as a fine and forthright piece of theatrical writing.

Mr. Williams, the author, is himself a Welshman by birth, and the play has, at least to a certain extent, followed the early days of his own career. It is, however, not merely this knowledge that gives "The Corn Is Green" a moving autobiographical quality. As it is played here, the central character of the story is the lovely and comprehending woman who comes to the Welsh village in the final years of the last century and finds such great incipient talent in the dirty, resentful boy from the near-by coal mines.

And the most touching thing about a genuinely touching drama is the manner in which the author seems to be looking back at a great and good woman who had been his benefactor, regarding her with the affection and comprehension that she must have deserved and paying a beautiful and heartfelt tribute to her. Here is merely the story of how this teacher recognized the quality of the boy and brought out the best that was in him, and somehow it becomes a tale of great point, meaning and quiet dramatic power.

Although it is essentially the narrative of the relationship between the middle-aged teacher and the boy, "The Corn Is Green" is filled with characters that always seem human beings, rather than figures in a play. The serious-minded Welsh Baptist and the shy, pretty spinster who are the teacher's loyal

assistants the reformed shoplifter and her sluttish daughter; the hide-bound, foolish, easily-led Tory, who is brought by flattery to become a supporter of the school; the most ancient of the pupils—here are people who invariably seem to live and breathe and to possess that unusual quality of having an actual life outside of the play. As for the relationship between the boy and the teacher, it is contemplated with such insight and wisdom that it never descends to any suggestion of the romantic or the scandalous but is always the true and compelling account of a noble and great-souled woman, without pose or heroics, and of the way she discovered and nurtured a young man capable, you feel sure, of becoming a leader of his people. It is one of the great beauties of the play that it always makes you feel that it is treating of people who are of value to the world.

To the splendid role of the teacher Miss Barrymore brings all of that radiance of hers, all of her sly, twinkling humor, her rich and warm humanity and her superb understanding of character. It is a rarely beautiful performance, a characterization of greatness and true nobility. In the part of the boy, the part that Mr. Williams created in London, Richard Waring acts with sensitiveness and insight, next to Miss Barrymore's work, however, I think that the finest performance in the cast is that of Miss Thelma Schnee, who plays the disreputable girl of the story with remarkable deftness and skill. There are splendid portrayals, too, by Rhys Williams as the earnest-minded Baptist, by Miss Mildred Dunnock as the assistant teacher, by Edmond Breon as the Tory squire, by Miss Rosalind Ivan as the reformed thief, and by Sayre Crawley as the ancient pupil. The setting by Howard Bay is excellently atmospheric and Herman Shumlin's direction is characteristically thoughtful and understanding. "The Corn Is Green" is a warm, compassionate play, filled with the richness of humanity.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 20, 1940

Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' Is Gayly Revived at the St. James

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

APPARENTLY what the theater needs is to place its trust in Shakespeare. The Theater Guild and Gilbert Miller, having put their heads together and reached that conclusion, brought "Twelfth Night" into the St. James last evening. Helen Hayes plays Viola, Maurice Evans is a Cockney Malvollio and over them Margaret Webster has waved that majestic director's wand she keeps handy for such occasions. The result is all sparkle and delight.

"Twelfth Night" has, of course, both those qualities to begin with. It is full of prankishness and invention and its intricate plot is tangled with the lightest of hands. It is full of those "quotations" which some innocent once found on first being exposed to a Shakespeare play; it is full, too, of songs and frolics and even the court fool is often merry. It is a small, gay play and it asks only recognition of its gaiety. This sort of recognition is, however, the kind most rarely accorded to Shakespeare.

Miss Webster and Miss Hayes and Mr. Evans, and almost all of those associated with them, laugh off all gloomy reverence. Mr. Evans's Cockney accent is a case in point, and somehow this device gives point to poor, ridiculous, much put upon Malvollio. He is a pompous spoil-sport as he emerges from Mr. Evans's astute, inventive playing. He struggles anxiously with his H's. When he is bid run after the disguised Viola to carry her the ring his horrified "Run?" is a summary of shocked dignity. The jest which took Malvollio strutting, cross-gartered, before his lady is still a little cruel for modern taste, but Mr. Evans's acting almost justifies it. Perhaps, carried away by his own humanity, he does once or twice make Malvollio a figure rather

for pity than for sport, but almost always he makes the steward as comically ridiculous as he must have seemed to the less sentimental eyes of the Elizabethans.

Miss Hayes has no such problem with Viola, one of the most human and touching of Shakespeare's minor heroines. She is captivating and jaunty; she can explore both the humor and the humanity out of Viola's curious predicament, loved for her boyish charm by Olivia and herself loving, hopelessly because of her masculine disguise, the noble Duke Orsino. And she has, too, the instinct and the timing, and almost above everything else, the clear enunciation, for the poetry in the role.

Malvollio and Viola seldom meet, so that only now and then, and briefly, are both the stars together on the stage. Other parts are almost as important, and the other parts are, almost without exception, beautifully played. June Walker, for example, is a lusty Maria; Wallace Acton a vacant-eyed and comical Sir Andrew Aguecheek. No actor is ever entirely

"TWELFTH NIGHT"

Shakespeare's comedy, arranged in two acts and fifteen scenes; directed by Margaret Webster; settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney; music by Paul Bowles; presented at the St. James Theater on November 19, 1940, by the Theater Guild and Gilbert Miller. The cast:

Orsino.....	Wesley Addy
Curio.....	George Keane
Valentine.....	Philip Huston
Viola.....	Helen Hayes
Sea Captain.....	Anthony Ross
Sir Toby Belch.....	Mark Smith
Maria.....	June Walker
Sir Andrew Aguecheek.....	Wallace Acton
Feste.....	Donald Burr
Olivia.....	Sophie Stewart
Malvollio.....	Maurice Evans
Antonio.....	Ellis Irving
Sebastian.....	Alex Courtney
Fabian.....	Raymond Johnson
Attendant to Olivia.....	June Brehm
Officer.....	Irving Morrow
Soldier.....	Anthony Ross
Sir Topas.....	William Hansen
A Page.....	Osbert Chevers
Watchman, Sailors, Soldiers, Musicians, and attendants to Olivia and Orsino—	
Jacqueline Paige, Larry Gates, Donald Buka, Max Leavitt.	

fortunate who has to play a Shakespeare clown, but Donald Burr is a delightful Feste. Sophie Stewart is beautiful and light handed as Olivia and Alex Courtney, lodged in the not very rewarding role of Viola's brother, Sebastian, manages not only to play it excellently but to look surprisingly like Miss Hayes. (It is possible, of course, that nature has helped him here.) Mark Smith's Sir Toby is neither very flexible nor very understandable in the early scenes, but later his playing takes on a fine unctious.

But perhaps we are getting lost in details. This production of "Twelfth Night" never loses itself so, whatever a reviewer may do. It is quick and light and all of a piece; Stewart Chaney has made it handsome and Miss Webster has shaken from it every grain of library dust. And so we are granted the happiest evening of this straggling season.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 20, 1940

Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans Appear in a Revival of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WITH the advice and consent of William Shakespeare, Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans are opening the Theatre Guild's twenty-third subscription season together. They are appearing in a revival of "Twelfth Night," which opened at the St. James last evening. The list of illustrious names includes two others: Gilbert Heron Miller appears as co-producer, and Margaret Webster has directed. With a battery of talent as devastating as that, you probably expect to be blown out of the theatre with brilliance. But to this courier of stage tidings the Guild "Twelfth Night" seems to be a performance of mixed blessings—good in spots, very good in spots, but unable to achieve the full gaiety that it strives to evoke from one of Shakespeare's sweetest comedies.

As her previous productions of Shakespeare have indicated, Miss Webster is all for pulling the master out of the schoolrooms and museums and setting him on the stage for modern enjoyment. "Twelfth Night" does not surrender to robustness as easily as "Richard III" and "Hamlet." Compounded of grace and horseplay, of music and slapstick, of romance and storybook make-believe, it does not drop into a pattern, and perhaps it needs lightness and beauty quite as much as skulduggery. The beauty of the current "Twelfth Night" is overlaid with a desire to be funny at any cost.

As Viola, Miss Hayes is very much her

disarming self—frank and simple and light-hearted. The comedy of her performance is most enjoyable when she trips over the dilemmas of her masquerade in boy's clothes. When she first suspects that Olivia is falling in love with her, and when she is mischievously pushed into the duel with Sir Andrew, Miss Hayes's gentleness and innocence of comedy style are especially enjoyable. Miss Hayes takes the whole part in a spirit of womanly good-will. But, at the risk of pedantry, isn't there more to the part of Viola than this—breeding and even sophistication of character, grace of motion, music of verse? Although Miss Hayes has played in verse drama before now, she is a prosy speaker in "Twelfth Night," and sometimes her postures are more rural than Illyrian,

and the mood she conveys is more pathetic than romantic.

An old hand at Shakespeare, Mr. Evans is superb. He is acting a Cockney Malvollio, which is an amusing idea. As usual, he has designed the character with imaginative detail, never forgetting the point of the scene he is playing. Without truckling to tomors for easy laughs, he can catch compositely in the tiniest suggestion of a strut or in the falsethness of ceremony. A master of Shakespearean dialogue, he can speak it for sense without losing the rhythm. "Run?" he inquires politely when Olivia bids him run after the Duke's messenger. It is only one word. But somehow Mr. Evans puts into it the disdain, the fastidiousness, the vanity and alarm of a fatuous underling. Put that down as acting.

Every one should feel fortunate in having June Walker play Maria. She speaks clearly, which is a blessing, but beyond that she is honestly hearty in expression of character, running around the stage with genuine excitement over the mischief Maria has invented—full and free in merriment. Mark Smith's Sir Toby is musical comedy fooling, much too self-conscious for the pleasure of an audience, and Wallace Acton's Sir Andrew is silly. Miss Walker can laugh either one of them into a neutral corner; she glows with festive spirit.

Some of the other parts are pleasantly acted. Sophie Stewart makes a handsome and accomplished Olivia. Wesley Addy does well by the love-sick Orsino. Although Donald Burr cannot make much out of Feste's chop-logic, he is a noble skipper and he sings the verses enchantingly. Stewart Chaney's settings are marvelously efficient, though lacking somewhat in romantic beauty, and his costumes are lively and inventive. Paul Bowles has composed music without Elizabethan affectation, more in a spirit of liveliness than of innocence.

As a holiday revel this "Twelfth Night" is rowdy, dry-humored and briskly paced. What it lacks is the part of Shakespeare's genius that made him a poet.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 20, 1940

Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans in "Twelfth Night"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH one cannot quote Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and say of "Twelfth Night," "Why, this is the best of fooling, when all is done," the comedy continues to hold its place in the affections. Many of the dry jests in which it abounds may have grown drier and drier with the centuries. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby may often have become tedious both in and out of their cups. A more merciful sense of laughter may have robbed the scene in which Malvolio is treated as a madman of the gaiety it once held. And the story itself, when it depends solely on mistaken identity for its interest, may nowadays emerge as a fable that is wearisome in its elaboration and irritating in its foolishness.

But these shortcomings do not win enemies. They are the idiosyncrasies—even the faults—one puts up with in an old and valued friend. Like the virtues, they are a part of the friendship, though not the cause of it. In this case, they are no more than parochialisms in time. They are what must be forgiven—or, rather, tolerated—so that the virtues (of which there are many) can be appreciated.

Although basically it tells the same dull story as "The Comedy of Errors," "Twelfth Night" does not limit itself to the complications of a DROMIO theme. It succeeds in setting that theme to song. Its action is not breathless. In its pleasant pauses, characters are projected that one loves. What they are seems somehow to be always of greater importance than what they do. The play is more than merely belterous. It is witty, too—and tender, in spite of its spirit of seasonal revelry.

Its rewarding features include the music of the speeches of the music-hungry Orsino; the pertness of Maria; and the occasional fine lines which, in spite of their comic catering, are spoken by Sir Andrew and Sir Toby (including his famous, "Dost thou think,

because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"). They also number the magic of such of the clown's songs as "What Is Love?" and "Come Away Death."

The wit of Olivia, the sheer joy of Viola's humorous lovesickness, and the comedy of Malvolio's Puritanical pomposity, both before the letter scene and after he is cross-gartered,—all these are smiling virtues, too, which make one forget, if not forgive, the cruel tricks the years have played on a light-hearted script.

Last night at the St. James it was far easier than it ordinarily is to overlook the mildewed interludes in the play. For Gilbert Miller and the Theatre Guild have given "Twelfth Night" a production of uncommon charm. They have persuaded Paul Bowles to keep it moving to the measures of his music. They have set it before backgrounds by Stewart Chaney which might well have graced a masque in those distant post-Shakespearean days when, even in entertainments at court, make-believe was much simpler than it now is. They have been wise enough, too, to intrust the direction to Margaret Webster, that lady whose gift for liberating Shakespeare on the contemporary stage can amount to genius. And they have cast it so

generously that one can only wonder why the woeful Sir Toby of Mark Smith is allowed to leave so much to be desired.

June Walker brings all of her delightful insouciance to Maria. Wesley Addy preserves the full loveliness of Orsino's speeches. Sophie Stewart is, for once, a gay Olivia, radiant in her wit no less than in her beauty. And Donald Burr, a singer of true skill and charm, is one of the few Shakespearean clowns in whose presence it is possible to sit without embarrassment.

Miss Hayes, Mr. Evans

"And what should I do in Illyria?" is the second question Viola asks herself. Doubtless there are those who will wonder why Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans should want to be there now. Neither Viola nor Malvolio are "star" parts in the ordinary sense of the word. But they are good parts, nonetheless, to which fine actors have always been drawn. Both Miss Hayes and Mr. Evans show once again what fine actors they are by their playing of the parts.

Although one may miss in Miss Hayes the music Julia Marlowe brought to her Viola, her performance is a beguiling one. It has the same quality and spirit without losing its self-pity. It benefits by Miss Hayes' shining intensity, and her excellent sense of comedy. If it can be lyrical with the Duke, it can be hilarious as it is in the hands of Sir Andrew, where Miss Webster's direction is at its most unawed and inventive. The truth is that Miss Hayes' is an entrancing creation which can claim among its many attributes the distinction of at last being a Viola so boyish in figure and motion that she can pass as Cesario without oversteering the credibility.

Mr. Evans brings all of his excellent endowments as a character actor to Malvolio. He does not burlesque the part by turning him into the clownish steward Mr. Sotherton—admirable Malvolio—was tempted to do. He plays him as a time-pleaser, sick of self-love; a pathetic, quiet, entirely human being who is more ridiculous inside than out. His Cockney accent, which he does not overstress, is the most felicitous of comic innovations.

No wonder, considering the hazards in the play, that last night's audience expressed its thanks for everything that had been done to bring out the old comedy's virtues by staying in the theatre to demand curtain call, after curtain call, and to thicken the air with "bravos." For in most respects the production was a highly satisfactory, even a notable, one.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 20, 1940

Miss Hayes, Evans Score in 12th Night

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Theatre Guild takes no reckless chances with the opening production of its 1940 season. It goes to an author named Shakespeare for its play. It engages Miss Helen Hayes and Mr. Maurice Evans for its chief players. It opens on a note of comedy, with a revival of Twelfth Night, rather than to attempt a serious—and probably futile—discussion of modern problems. And a very happy, mellow and altogether captivating presentation it turns out to be.

Margaret Webster has once more directed the latest and, with the possible exception of the Lunts' Taming of the Shrew, the merriest Shakespearean revival seen in New York for many years. Her product is inventive, imaginative and in some respects precedent-shattering, and she has received the warmest of co-operation from an excellent company.

Miss Hayes gives us a sprightly Viola, a brisk, boyish, lovable Viola. Throughout the masquerade, she never surrenders the sweet daintiness of her femininity to further her disguise as a youth. She is charming.

It is Mr. Evans, however, who spares neither himself nor tradition nor the play itself, to provoke sound and honest laughter. This Malvolio of his is a magnificent anachronism, a deliberate, cheerfully brazen metamorphosis of a medieval major-domo into a 20th century cockney butler, pompous, witless and more often than not in comic difficulties with his pronunciation. And whether

or not you may be bothered by the relation of such a character to the formal court life of Shakespeare's Illyria, it is his Malvolio that dominates the entire play.

In such company there is little room for other clowns, and it may be for that reason that Mark Smith's Toby Belch was as flatly disappointing as Mr. Evans' Malvolio was startling and hilarious. There was little of the roistering toss-pot in Mr. Smith's portrayal and not the slightest Falstaffian flavor to it, although the lines were spoken competently and there was a hint of elephantine humor in one or two scenes.

Wesley Addy is one of the most graceful players of our day when it comes to the romantic Shakespearean roles, and he does nothing to endanger the high reputation he

has been constantly building through his association with previous Evans revivals and, last year, in the unfortunate Leigh-Olivier production of Romeo and Juliet, wherein he was one of the few actors who escaped the whirlwind of criticism. He plays the Duke handsomely.

I am grateful to Miss Webster—as always—for her insistence upon pure diction. These players, without exception, give full weight and value to every syllable of the poetry, with round and appreciative understanding of its meaning. They meet the first requisite of a stage presentation of Shakespeare, which is that it should be clearly heard and clearly understood.

There are other favorites besides Miss Hayes and Mr. Evans in the cast. June Walker makes a bouncing Maria, mischievous, jolly and appealing. She skips about the stage as lightly as tumble-weed and, by always seeming to have the merriest time imaginable, can make an audience have one too. Donald Burr, his role limited only by the broad boundaries of musical comedies, breaks even those bounds now to take his first legitimate role as Feste, the clown. I was impressed not only by the excellence of his voice, but by the informal songs that occasionally relieve the dialogue, but by his acting manner.

Sophie Stewart, an importation from England, gave us sparkling beauty and pleasant wit to her portrayal of Olivia, and Raymond Johnson, a favorite of mine in comedy roles, gave a Gallic twist and considerable flavor to the otherwise minor figure of Fabian. The absurdities of Shakespeare's impossible plot never are too obvious in this presentation, and when they are in danger of becoming so, it takes only the appearance of Mr. Evans, dropping, picking up and sometimes replacing his missing aitches, or Miss Hayes, striding cockily into the court, to make you stop worrying about it.

Certainly the Guild and Gilbert Miller, who is associated with it as co-producer, have every reason to be congratulated. Twelfth Night is definitely on the must list, and that goes for the old folks and the toddling infants.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 20, 1940

Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans Give Character to "Twelfth Night"

"Twelfth Night," comedy by William Shakespeare. Revived by the N. Y. Theatre Guild and Gilbert Miller at the St. James Theatre, New York, Nov. 19, 1940.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

SHAKESPEARE'S "Twelfth Night," to speak the truth of it, has been fair game for all manner of Shakespearean actors for a good many years. For most of the 339 years, in fact, since first it was written to provide an interlude for a feast of the "benchers" of Middle Temple in the London of 1601.

I myself have seen it done with as great seriousness as the text permits by the high and mighty of the profession, and as a sort of sophomore romp by stock companies and the lowlier traveling troupes.

Take it at its worst and it can be the goshawfullest bore in all the classic repertory. Or taken at its best, when the Viola has charm and a gift for romance, and the Orsino and Olivia, the Malvolio and Aguecheek and the Maria and Sir Toby are made a convincing part of the picture, it can become for two-thirds its length a happy evening in the theatre.

Last the Best

The best revival in all its parts in our memory, I think, is now on view at the St. James Theatre, where Helen Hayes last night played the Viola and Maurice Evans was the Malvolio. And where the assisting company played consistently and brilliantly up to these leaders.

The common custom has been to play "Twelfth Night" almost exclusively for the Viola, and to make a farcical romp of the rest of it. In the Hayes-Evans revival, Margaret Webster, who directed it, has undertaken to give value to the romance and to curb the rowdiness of the Sir Toby-Maria-Aguecheek trio.

There are no caricatures in her grouping. The Aguecheek does not step out of charac-

ter to prove how funny he thinks an effeminate coxcomb might be. The Malvolio is not a heavy-minded Shakespearean star, barren of comedy impulse, lacking utterly the comic split (as even such high ones as Irving and Sothern were), but a player with a true and fine sense of comedy without caricature.

The Orsino is not a sighing sap, though heaven knows it is hard to make anything else of him if you follow the lines and the dictated business. The Olivia is still a foolish lady who pretends to be fooled by a fegding youth, but we can take that.

Sir Toby and Maria, Aguecheek and Feste, come far enough out of the scullery to be appreciably as human in their reactions as they are orderly and presentable in their dress. And all this makes for some semblance of sanity in the recital of the frolic that it usually has lacked.

Of course, it is still largely Viola's evening, as it must be, with any actress possessing Helen Hayes' particularly persuasive charm and personality playing that befuddled young person. But never does this Viola in-

trude upon the performances of the others. Because she is doubly earnest in her enterprise, first to do justice to Shakespeare and second to prove her right to be accepted with the other great ladies of her profession she makes the early scenes beautifully important.

Beating Shakespeare

Her pretty terror at playing the boy, her confession of dismay at discovering her love for Orsino, her simulated swagger to carry off the deception, her reading of all the test speeches—these are so beautifully timed and played as to bring a mist to the eyes of her admirers.

And though as the plot wears thin, and repetition dulls the edge of interest, and the final matching of Cesario and Sebastian sort of explodes the whole foolish business—even though Shakespeare demands she still is the splendid actress who definitely has won her place in the company of the great.

The Evans Malvolio is far and away the best I have seen. He plays the majordomo mood of Orsino with a bit of a Cockney accent which may outrage some but all right with me—anything that improves Malvolio is that much gain—but never once does he overplay so much as a line, and never once does he fall in suggesting a believable eccentric.

Wesley Addy's Orsino, too, seems a human kind, and Addy is not by the gods' choice a romantic actor. Wallace Acton's Aguecheek is also kept within bounds. Even the silly duel scene is better than it usually is, thanks partly to this type of fooling.

Sophie Stewart is a nicely feminine Olivia, June Walker's Maria a hearty and healthy maid, Mark Smith's Sir Toby a tub of sack, but always reasonably acceptable. And Donald Burr, though not a particularly festive Feste, sings well and reads intelligently.

The production, by Stewart Chaney, is handsome and simple. It is all very superior Shakespeare, in fact. Thanks, again, to the stars and Margaret Webster.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 20, 1940

Viola and Malvolio

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ALTHOUGH "Twelfth Night" contains some of the worst features of Elizabethan comedy, it has charm, grace and loveliness, and these saving qualities are captured to abundance in this handsome and skillful new production. With Miss Hayes playing Viola with rare beauty, with Mr. Evans offering a brilliant and curiously touching cockney Malvolio, with Miss Margaret Webster's shrewd direction again lively and inventive, with splendid sets and costumes by Stewart Chaney and with an attractive accompanying score by Paul Bowles, this frayed and often painful comedy becomes again a thing of youth and gayety. Even those incredibly boring scenes of drunken comedy between Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek seem interludes to be skipped over as quickly as possible, rather than the fatal handicaps to entertainment they can so readily become. This production of "Twelfth Night" is a tribute to the Theater Guild, to Gilbert Miller and to the dramatic season.

The chief news of the evening is, of course, Miss Hayes. This is her first Shakespearean appearance on Broadway, but she is completely and happily at home in it. Here is a portrayal of sweet and tender loveliness, so gracefully mixed with shrewd and winning comedy that it becomes a glowing delight. Whether in her confusion when Olivia is making love to her, her bewilderment when she is mistaken by Antonio for

her twin brother, her terror at being forced into the duel with Sir Anthony, or in her wistful approaches to the unknowing Orsino, this Viola is an exquisite portrayal, lyric, warm, human, humorous and incredibly moving. In facing the great test of a difficult Shakespearean role, Miss Hayes not only lives up to her incomparable stature as an actress, but even increases it. If this presentation of the old play had no other virtue, it would be something for all theatergoers to see.

As for Mr. Evans, his Malvolio is the sort of performance that we have come to expect of him, which means, of course, that it is Shakespearean acting at its best. Elizabethan comedy today tends to seem not only

boring but barbarous, and never was the Shakespearean humor more savage than in the mocking of Malvolio and his carrying-off to a madhouse. Ugly practical jokes seem no less unpleasantly brutal because they are played in the classic style. Thus the only way to act Malvolio and keep audiences from writhing in their seats at the treatment accorded him, is to make him not only pompous, stuffy and foolish but also human and a little touching in his fatuous attempts at dignity. The slight cockney accent, the desperate efforts to get all the h's in their right place, these things somehow add to the humanity of the unfortunate man, and the Evans characterization in both its humor and its understanding is one of high excellence. But the madhouse scene does remain one of discomfort.

It is my firm conviction that no actors in the world could make Sir Toby and Sir Andrew funny today. I do imagine that more in the direction of comedy might have been achieved than Mark Smith and Wallace Acton, who play the roles, ever manage, but their tasks were impossible ones from the start and there is no reason for blaming them severely. Shakespearean clowns are not comfortable roles these days, either, but Donald Burr, who can sing pleasantly, manages Feste with more ease than is ordinarily to be found in such parts. With the characters of Olivia and Orsino we come back to more recognizable grounds, and in these roles Miss Sophie Stewart and Wesley Addy are excellent. A more difficult feat, though, is performed by Miss June Walker, who actually makes Maria, the girl practical joker, a lively and a living person, despite the fact that the few Shakespearean comedies are not much more entertaining than the masculine ones. Here is "Twelfth Night" in a delightful production.

"Panama Hattie"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 31, 1940

"Panama Hattie", Hot Number Fresh From the Canal Zone

"Panama Hattie," musical comedy by Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva; music and lyrics by Cole Porter. Produced by Mr. De Sylva at the 46th St. Theatre, New York, Oct. 30, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

NOW we have the lusty and likable Ethel Merman pretending to be one of the most virgins of the Canal Zone girls with a throat bursting with romantic and comical songs and a heart bursting with motherly love.

They are fast and crafty thinkers, the Herbert Fields-Buddy De Sylva-Cole Porter trio, as you who remember "Du Barry Was a Lady," as who doesn't? well know.

They have evolved a safe formula for musical comedies which contrasts sex with sentiment and burlesque with beauty. It worked with "Du Barry," which began in a gents' wash room and moved on to the Palace at Versailles.

And it works in "Panama Hattie," which begins at the Tropical Shore, where Hattie is one of the girls, and moves on to Philadelphia where she promises to become one of the Bullettas.

At least that appeared to be the plot pattern when I reluctantly left the first performance last night.

It Was This Way

Nick Bullett was one of the trusted men at the control room of the Canal locks. He had employed his off time making love to Hattie, and when his 8-year-old daughter was shipped down from Philadelphia by his divorced wife's mother he was in a bit of a spot.

He wanted to marry Hattie—but what if the child didn't like her? Which she didn't! Then it was up to Hattie to win over the

child, or for Nick to change his plans.

Hattie and Nick have a two-act time of it. But when Hattie rushes down a treadmill road at the end of the evening and saves Nick—and the Canal—and the chief comedian—from being blown up by a Fifth Column bomb—what can you expect?

Expect what you want to. What you get is a musical comedy entertainment that, like "Du Barry," makes up in showier entertainment values what it lacks in refinement.

And who would expect refinement, as such, from Herbert Fields and Producer De Sylva, who wrote the book, or Cole Porter, who did the music and lyrics? They write for fun and the support of the crowd.

And who wouldn't expect beauty and char-

acter and zip from Raoul Pene DuBois, the costume and scenery genius; Robert Alton, the dance genius, and Edgar MacGregor, who has a way of helping to pull all these elements together in a story pattern that some way seems to make better sense than you might expect.

These Also Serve

There are also the usual group of gifted specialists to add the finishing touch to "Panama Hattie." These include the graceful and lively Nadine Gae, a dancer of splendid rhythm; a willowy bit of bronze billed as Carmen D'Antonio and a tapping chorus of fine training.

The principals include Arthur Treacher, who manages to extract merriment from a frozen-faced butler; and Betty Hutton, who was an amusing jitterbug last season, but who has let her directors belittle her talent by overplaying it unforgivably.

And a new wonder child, little Joan Carroll, aged 8, and precocious no end. Already a gifted little actress who has made a couple of films and who can hold her own with a whole stageful of adult principals.

And Rags Ragland, a rough but funny boy from burlesque, flanked by Pat Harrington and Frank Hyers, of similar type.

Nothing new to say of Miss Merman. She is singing especially well, and looking particularly fresh and lovely, and she makes a thorough job of her assignment, as is her custom.

The Porter lyrics, some of his best, and the Porter melodies, ditto, come over beautifully, causing me to suspect a new amplifying system. "Let's Be Buddies," for sentiment; "I've Still Got My Health," for verve; "You Said It," for Broadway. You'll be hearing a lot of them.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 31, 1940

Ethel Merman Excellent In "Panama Hattie"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN HER finest form, than which there is none finer, Ethel Merman sweeps triumphantly through "Panama Hattie." For the first time she is now being starred alone in a major musical comedy. The evening she dominates with all that strident precision which is hers is a happy example of our professional theatre when it is functioning at its professional best.

Cole Porter has supplied it with many pleasant melodies which benefit by the wizardry with which he can juggle the rhymes and nonsense in his lyrics. Robert Alton has seized upon the hot insinuations of Mr. Porter's music for one dance

number after another which are tropical in their heat and brilliantly staged. Raoul Pene DuBois has backed these gay interludes with effective scenery, and clothed a stageful of beguiling maidens with some of the most colorful and distinguished costumes which have been seen hereabouts in a long time. And Herbert Fields—with B. G. DeSylva's aid has provided a book which does its riotous and rowdy duty (with moments of sentiment thrown in) without ever getting in the way. Mr. Fields and Mr. DeSylva's book is classical enough to boast some subplots, one of which not only involves three gobs in

some lusty shore activities but touches upon sabotage in the Canal Zone. The book's chief concern, however, is the way in which Panama Hattie, a toughie with a heart of gold, wins, first, the affections of the eight-year-old Philadelphia daughter of the man she loves, and, then, after much trouble with a villainous glamour girl, reconquers the friendship of her fiance's boss.

Miss Merman's Best

If the story fades from view from time to

time, this is as it should be. Before vanishing, however, it does serve its purpose by supplying the production with both atmosphere and audacity, and Miss Merman with the best—certainly the most sympathetic—part she has so far had.

Although the evening is Mr. Porter's, Mr. DuBois', and, above all, Miss Merman's, there are others to be gratefully remembered. Pat Harrington, Frank Hyers, and Rags Ragland are immensely droll as the three comic sailors. Joan Carroll is a child actress of great charm and poise who avoids all the pitfalls of the precocious. As an English butler the grave face and grave manner of Arthur Treacher prove of most assistance. No one can accuse Betty Hutton of lacking energy. Nadine Gae is a dancer of genuine grace and attraction. And Carmen D'Antonio is a lady who by herself can teach the Art magazines lessons.

But the moving spirit in this musical comedy which Mr. DuBois has made so colorful, and its truest source of admiration, is Miss Merman. As Panama Hattie she once again mobilizes her uncommon skill to project some of Mr. Porter's glibbest tunes. Miss Merman has lost none of her energy. She blows through the script like a cyclone. She is what she is—proudly, gloriously. Broadway, not Park Avenue, finds its voice in her, and every one listens to her enraptured.

Hers is an exceptional talent. She is as gay as she is noisy, as likable as she is energetic, as amiable as she is assertive. Moreover, she continues to grow. She can now match the brazen good humor of "I've Got My Strength" with the tenderness of "Let's Be Buddies." Miss Merman has never been better than she is now at the Forty-sixth Street. For that matter Broadway does not often see a musical comedy more expertly done than is the blushing "Panama Hattie."

"Panama Hattie"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 31, 1940

'Panama Hattie,' With Ethel Merman, Opens at the Forty-sixth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT IS TIME now for the annual pean in praise of Miss Ethel Merman, who came swinging back to town last evening in "Panama Hattie," a particularly luxurious musical comedy contrived by B. G. De Sylva. Everything is right as right can be with Miss Merman and everything is pretty much right with "Panama Hattie," which has music and lyrics by Cole Porter, costumes and scenery by Raoul Pene DuBois and a book by Herbert Fields and Mr. De Sylva himself.

Put all these people together and you have a show which ought to keep the Forty-sixth Street Theater bright and gay for months to come. Mr. DuBois, aided by the inspiration he apparently keeps in his hip pocket, has made it both by keeping the stage full of gorgeous color. His settings have a super-DuBois glitter and his costumes glow on the pretty girl. Mr. De Sylva has generously provided. Mr. Porter's songs give Miss Merman plenty of chances, and a chance is all Miss Merman ever needs.

The book is, to be sure, a little odd. It appears to turn upon a plot to blow up the Panama Canal and that seems rather a weighty theme for such goings-on as these. Miss Merman saves the canal, which is mighty fine of her—she's just the girl to do it, I think, supposing it needs to be done. By saving the canal, Miss Merman also saves love, and if this sounds a little complicated you will have

to take the matter up with Mr. Fields and Mr. De Sylva. (Seems Miss Merman, who has a rough exterior as Hattie, got in bad with her man's boss, but after she saved the canal the boss relented. Sounds pretty silly, doesn't it?)

In addition to Miss Merman, who sings such things as "Let's Be Buddies," "My Mother Would Love You," "I've Still Got My Health," and "Make It Another Old-Fashioned, Please," and who walks with her own amazing elasticity and who is very comical when she chooses, "Panama Hattie" has other enticements. It has Rags Ragland, Pat Harrington and Frank Hyers to play funny sailors; James Dunn to be loved by Miss Merman

'PANAMA HATTIE'

A musical comedy in two acts; music and lyrics by Cole Porter; book by Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva; costumes and scenery by Raoul Pene DuBois; dances by Robert Alton; book staged by Edgar MacGregor; presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on October 30, 1940, by Mr. De Sylva. The cast:

Mac	Conchita
Mac	Eppy Pearson
Skat Briggs	Pat Harrington
Windy Deegan	Frank Hyers
Woody Hogan	Rags Ragland
Chiquita	Nadine Gae
Fruit Peddler	Linda Griffith
Tim	Roger Gerry
Tom	Raymond Haine
Ted	Fred Daniels
Ty	Lipman Duckat
Hattie Maloney	Ethel Merman
Leila Tree	Phyllis Brooks
Mildred Hunter	Blaine Shepard
Kitty Gelle Randolph	Ann Graham
Nick Bullett	James Dunn
Florine	Betty Hutton
Geraldine Bullett	Joan Carroll
Vivian Budd	Arthur Treacher
First Stranger	Al Downing
Second Stranger	Frank DeRoss
Mike	Jack Donahoe
Whitney Randolph	James Keiso

and Miss Betty Hutton. Miss Hutton is so amiable she almost comes apart, and I think it would be nice if she could calm down a little—just to the pace of St. Vitus dance, say. Also present are Nadine Gae, who dances beautifully; Carmen D'Antonio, who dances disturbingly; Arthur Treacher, who is gravely comical, and Joan Carroll, who must be all of 8 and is a nice little girl, even if she is a Hollywood child.

Everything is, in short, going great guns at the Forty-sixth Street. Miss Merman particularly.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 31, 1940

Miss Merman in Panama

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

HERE is Broadway girl-and-music saturnalia at its peak, humorous, tuneful, hard-boiled, sentimental, rapidly paced and handsome, filled with good low comedians and beautiful girls and starring the wonderful Miss Ethel Merman in the leading role. You really shouldn't ask for much more. Mr. De Sylva, the producer, is likewise the sponsor of "DuBarry Was A Lady" and "Louisiana Purchase," but "Panama Hattie" seems to me by far the best of the trio. I should say that, with the three of them running in town at one time, Mr. De Sylva now stands pretty conclusively as head man in the field of musical comedy production. Put down this "Panama Hattie" as a rough and rowdy show, in the traditions of handsomely dressed, burlesque, and give it credit for being so frank and forthright in its bawdiness that there isn't a touch of prurience in it. In a word or two, I recommend it.

Probably it is hardly worth bothering you with the information that "Panama Hattie" has some sort of plot about an attempt to blow up the Canal Zone and the schemes of the wicked Miss Phyllis Brooks to double-cross Miss Merman and take her lover away from her. I may add that both machinations fail, and then go on to tell you that Mr. Porter's score is gay and engaging, that the book by Herbert Fields and Mr. De Sylva doesn't get in the way, that Robert Alton has staged the dances with his usual skill and

originality, that the sets and costumes by Raoul Pene DuBois are strikingly beautiful and that the lighting is exceptional. Even then we haven't got around to Miss Merman, and in this connection I may add that she is even better than ever, which is saying something. It is hard to believe it, but I think that she sings more effectively, acts more engagingly and looks handsomer than in any of her previous shows.

Mr. De Sylva has tried one hazardous thing in "Panama Hattie" and he has managed to get away with it with remarkable deftness. As I have said, this is a hard-boiled show, with lines, situations and songs that are merrily given to the topic of lechery. A

vastly amusing low comedian named Rags Ragland, who is in the best tradition of the burlesque comic, is a hilarious fellow, and so are his antic companions, Pat Harrington and Frank Hyers, of Jack White's celebrated Club 18. When these boys get together, the humor is not for sensitive folk. Yet in the same show there is a genuinely charming child of eight named Joan Carroll, who performs so delightfully that any prejudice you may have against child actresses is certain to be destroyed forthwith. By the shrewdness of selection, it has been seen that little Miss Carroll is not on the stage during the rowdiness and that the show gets amiably sentimental when she appears. I can only hope, though, that she doesn't pass much of her time off stage standing in the wings.

Prominent in the cast is Arthur Treacher, the cinema butler, who now becomes a stage butler and makes the transition with considerable success. There is an excellent dancer in the person of Miss Nadine Gae, and, while Miss Brooks is inclined to go to extremes in her impersonation of the villainess of the show, she is pretty enough to more than atone for it. James Dunn, of the films, is a satisfactory hero. At this moment my kind words must cease, for present in the cast is Miss Betty Hutton, the litterbug, and it is my impression that Miss Hutton should be given one number, if that, in the course of an evening and then be permitted to work off her surplus energies elsewhere. Rather than end on such a surly note, though, I would prefer to go back to Mr. Porter's score for a moment. It is filled with any number of excellent songs and it might be hard for one to pick his favorite from them. I think that of all the numbers, I most enjoyed a comic song called "You Said It," which Miss Merman and the Messrs. Treacher, Harrington and Hyers sing to splendid effect. "Panama Hattie" should prove to be a phenomenal hit.

"Panama Hattie"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 31, 1940

Panama Hattie Has All a Musical Needs

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

PANAMA HATTIE blew into the 46th Street Theater last night with breezy Ethel Merman in the title role, a portfolio of catchy Cole Porter songs to swing on, glittering scene arrangements by Raoul Pene DuBois and the exciting variety of dancing for which B. G. De Sylva's musical shows have become especially noted in recent years. So who could ask for anything more?

Mr. De Sylva, incidentally, hangs up some sort of record, at least for these lean years along Broadway for he now has three extravagant productions running at one time, two of them smash hits, and the latest, Panama Hattie, promising to become one.

If you remember a song in Du Barry, in which La Merman told the saga of Katie in Haiti, you may like to know that Katie seems to have moved over to Panama, where she has become Hattie. At least it seems like the same girl, in the same short, tight hobble skirt, with the same feather bos and ostrich plumes and gaudy jewelry, and—at the beginning of the new show—with approximately the same set of morals.

Panama Hattie, however, has a heart of gold, the instinct of motherhood and deep, pure love in her heart for a good man. So she reforms, which is too bad, because most of the customers prefer her when she is wicked and more interesting. Anyway, her regeneration is complete when she saves the canal from being blown up by fifth columnists and the

curtain falls on a scene of maudlin joy.

You can see by this that the book, by Herbert Fields and Mr. De Sylva, doesn't really amount to much, but who cares so long as the Merman girl is on the stage with a song to sing and some expert clowning to do?

There is no exquisite Bert Lahr in this year's show, but Mr. De Sylva has surrounded his star with some excellent hired help. There is, for instance, the solemn-visaged and meticulously correct Arthur Treacher, the world's greatest Wodehouse butler, who has come back from Hollywood to add dignified gaiety to the proceedings. There is Rag Ragland, up from burlesque, giving his genial buffoonery to the scene. And James Dunn,

a little hoarse on opening night, but spreading his fine personality all over the stage. And Pat Harrington and Frank Hyers, making with Ragland a trio of whole-souled American gobs who have only one thing on their collective mind.

There is also a young woman of 2, who has the most attractive child personality I have ever seen outside of a Shirley Temple picture, and there were moments when this charming youngster nearly ran away with the whole production. Her name is Joan Carroll, and Hollywood must have been blind to let her go.

Mr. De Sylva is particularly fortunate—or particularly wise—in his selection of dancers. Nadine Gae is not featured in the billing, but I think she should be. For two years we have seen her, first in *One for the Money* and then in *Two for the Show*, and this column goes on record as declaring her one of the most pleasing young dancers on the Broadway stage today. She is graceful and adept and she does not attempt the impossible. And she is one of the glorious few who do NOT wear the fixed and artificial smile of the professional adagio artist.

Betty Hutton, Public Jitterbug No. 1, is also screaming her wares in Panama Hattie, and is the same quivering bundle of nerves and muscles that she was last season. (She is the brass trumpet of the De Sylva band, and if you like her, as most people do, your evening will be complete.)

The most typical Merman songs—hence the most memorable—are *I've Still Got My Health*, *My Family Would Love You*, *Let's Be Buddies* (despite a touch of mawkish sentiment) and *I'm Throwing a Ball Tonight*. The most entertaining, however, in the tomfoolery of its lyrics and the manner of its delivery was one called *You Said It*, in which Miss Merman was joined by the Messrs. Treacher, Ragland, Hyers and Harrington.

The music, as a whole, is not the most striking of Mr. Porter's recent work, but it is brisk and fresh and crisp, and it sets a good pace for the show. The dialogue contains, from time to time, some extraordinary funny lines and newly coined quips, which the boisterous and sure-tongued Merman delivers with gusto.

It begins to appear that the only sure hits on Broadway are the revivals and the musicals, and this is one of them.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 31, 1940

Ethel Merman in 'Panama Hattie' With Cole Porter's Songs and Lyrics and Lots of Stuff

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVERYTHING is in order in "Panama Hattie," which opened at the Forty-sixth Street last evening. Cole Porter wrote the music and lyrics in his pithiest style, and Ethel Merman sings them like a high-compression engine. Cole plus Merman is a combination that has yielded some memorable musical shows in recent years. "Panama Hattie" holds her own with any of them. For Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva have written a roaring book about sailors in the Panama Canal Zone. By hiring a trio of knockabout comedians, Mr. De Sylva has given it all the advantages of a burlesque show. There is even a touch of sentiment in it. Although Broadway's expectations of "Panama Hattie" have been ambitious, the realities are equal to the occasion. Everything is noisy, funny and in order.

Not in proper order exactly. Improper order comes closer to the truth. If you go to the theatre, you know what sailors in Panama are interested in. Well, it ain't in battleships. Hewing close to the facts of life, the authors have thrown the sailors at the strumpets in

the water-front honky-tonks, taking pains to present La Merman as a coarse-timbred entertainer with a heart of gold. She knows what to do with a part like that. She rolls through it with the greatest gusto, giving it a shake and a gleam and plenty of syncopation. Most of Gotham's round-abouts will be turning up some time during the Winter to hear her bellowing "Visit Panama." "I've Still Got My Health" and "You Said It," and

turning "Make It Another Old-Fashioned, Please" into a torch song. The Merman hangs bangles on any song that comes her way.

"Panama Hattie" does not seem to be particularly bawdy, although undoubtedly it is. For the sailors are played with a kind of youthful braggadocio by Pat Harrington and Frank Hyers, who usually throw jokes around at Jack White's boisterous hang-out, and by Rags Ragland, who has done a long stretch in burlesque. Being full of animal exuberance, they manage to keep "Panama Hattie" out of the middens. And Betty Hutton as a diva of the Canal joints is in the pink of health, raising ructions with the book in her style of blond vertigo. Arthur Treacher strides solemnly through sin as a dour butler. For sunshine and sentiment, little Joan Carroll, who is now fully eight years old, is wholly captivating. She and Miss Merman get along together beautifully, and gruff old codgers are going to choke a little this Winter when tot and temptress sing "Let's Be Buddies" and bring the house down.

As a matter of fact, "Panama Hattie" is as stuffed with good things as a mince pie. Dancers are forever whirling through it like swarms of tropical flies, and ballets in some of Raoul Pene DuBois's most flamboyant costumes are forever charging on and off. The South American influence is creeping into Broadway culture. The welcome, as well as the dancing is warm. Nadine Gae and Carmen D'Antonia need asbestos stages.

If the Navy ever hears about "Panama Hattie," it will be hard to keep the fleet in the Pacific. As far as that goes, it is going to be hard to keep New Yorkers at home in the evenings this Winter.

"Cabin in the Sky"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 26, 1940

'Cabin in the Sky,' With Ethel Waters, Is Offered at the Martin Beck

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A GOOD bit of imagination and a lot of music have been poured into "Cabin in the Sky," which opened at the Martin Beck Theater last evening. And Miss Ethel Waters has also been poured into it, making a pleasant show a joyful one. Miss Waters sings this time; sings almost constantly, abandoning herself to the music as she and not many others can and rounding her startled eyes and permitting remarkable expressions to cross her brown, oddly childlike face.

At intervals, and they are the best, "Cabin in the Sky" catches in its book some of the engaging originality of its star. It ventures into fantasy, prances out into Broadway, mingles virtually all possible moods into a slightly indescribable melange. It is frequently funny in a wide-eyed way, now and then sufficiently orgiastic in the fashion of Negro dancing shows, brash and oddly gentle at practically one and the same time. When the brown girls and boys are not tying themselves in knots, the play deals with the very moot question of Little Joe Jackson's ultimate destination.

Little Joe has led a rowdy life and is departing it, considerably slashed up by a razor, when the question of his soul arises. Petunia is his wife and she prays for Joe. Lucifer Jr., Satan's heir and operations officer, leaps onto the stage with attending imps to take Joe along. But Petunia's prayers are heard, heavenly hosts arrive and Joe gets another chance. He is allowed six months to try it again, while Lucifer and the Lawd's General struggle over him. Lucifer, pondering the matter with his idea men in a refrigerated section of hell, has a fine notion and it almost works. But Petunia is too much for the devil in the end and Joe, although never at his best against temptation, wriggles through.

Lynn Root, who wrote the book, may have had "Green Pastures" far back in a corner of his mind. "Cabin in the Sky" didn't turn out that way, particularly, although now and then it has a comic innocence which a little echoes the Negro classic. Its best humor has something of the same quality. But its songs, which have lyrics by John Latouche and music by Vernon Duke, and the dancing are nothing more serious, and nothing less entertaining, than lively musical comedy. Miss Waters sings the best of the songs, often with the J. Rosamond Johnson singers behind her. She sings "Taking

'CABIN IN THE SKY'

A musical play in two acts; book by Lynn Root; lyrics by John Latouche; music by Vernon Duke; staged by George Balanchine; settings and costumes by Boris Aronson; dialogue directed by Albert Lewis. Presented at the Martin Beck Theater on October 25, 1940, by Mr. Lewis in association with Vinton Freedley. The cast:

Georgia Brown.....	Katherine Dunham
Dr. Jones.....	Louis Sharp
Brother Green.....	J. Rosamond Johnson
Lily.....	Georgia Burke
Petunia Jackson.....	Ethel Waters
Lucifer Jr.....	Rex Ingram
Little Joe Jackson.....	Dooley Wilson
.....	Archie Savage
Imps.....	Jeno Moxser
.....	Rajah Chardleno
.....	Alexander McDonald
The Lawd's General.....	Todd Duncan
Fleefoot.....	Milton Williams
John Henry.....	J. Louis Johnson
Dude.....	Al Moore
First Henchman.....	Earl Sydnor
Second Henchman.....	Earl Edwards
Third Henchman.....	Maurice Ellis
Devil's Messenger.....	Al Stokes
Messenger Boy.....	Wilson Bradley
Domino Johnson.....	Dick Campbell

a Chance on Love." "Cabin in the Sky," "My Old Virginia Home on the Nile" and "Love Turns the Light Out," among others. I won't try to tell you how well she sings them. Either you know, or there isn't space enough here.

Dooley Wilson is richly funny, in a baffled way, as Little Joe and Rex Ingram is a very jolly devil. Todd Duncan, Katherine Dunham and Mr. Johnson himself are among the others in the animated cast and as Dunham's dancers are something to watch.

The play slips a little into routine toward the end, when the authors fall back on a safe scene and require Miss Waters to leap out of character, and some of the shifts of mood are almost alarmingly sudden. But by and large it is imaginative and gay and at its best it has a special quality of its own. It also has Miss Waters and she has never been more engaging.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 26, 1940

Ethel Waters Back In Musical Fantasy

Cabin in the Sky Performed by Excellent All-Negro Cast

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ETHEL WATERS returned to her native element, musical comedy, last night, after her triumph of two years ago in the legitimate drama, and without in the least decrying her magnificent work in Mamba's Daughters, it is good to hear her lift her voice in song once more.

Her new vehicle, a fantasy in primitive terms and written in high good humor, is called Cabin in the Sky. Played exuberantly by an all-Negro cast of excellent singers and dancers, it relates the epic struggle between Lucifer and the Archangels for possession of the soul of a weak and very human crap-shooter. It has some—but not too much—of the atmosphere of The Green Pastures in its book, and it boasts two songs, among others, that are likely to stand at the top in all popularity lists far, far into the winter.

George Balanchine, the eminent choreographer, not only arranged the dancing, which is on the swing side, but directed the entire production. As a result, it is fast moving, well paced and so simply acted that it provides one of the most cheerful evenings it

is possible to have on Broadway.

Vernon Duke's music is well adapted to this type of show. Its rhythms are not imported entirely from the Caribbean nor from South America, although many of them have the rapid and syncopated drum beats that seem so essential in popular modern music. Some of them, and I think the best of them, are simple melodies, plaintively sung and some of them are spirituals.

The humor of Cabin in the Sky, as I said, is primitive, and neither in the book (by Lynn Root) nor the lyric (by John Latouche) is there any attempt to crowd the action with oversophisticated dialogue. Mr. Root's fantasy introduces a red devil, horns and all, in the person of Rex Ingram, who is opposed by a magnificent Lawd's General, in the gaudiest uniform that has been worn since The Emperor Jones, played by Todd Duncan. These antagonists contend for the soul of Little Joe Jackson, a miserable sinner who not only enjoys the galloping dominoes, but who chases after wenches. With the aid of Little Joe's wife, Petunia, the Lawd's General wins the battle.

Miss Waters plays Petunia with infectious jollity. She not only sings, in her inimitable manner, but she throws her not inconsiderable weight into rumbas and jitterbug numbers with all the agility of a mature Betty Hutton.

It is a fine cast that Producers Albert Lewis and Vinton Freedley obtained for this show. I particularly liked Todd Duncan's voice and acting, and Rex Ingram seemed thoroughly at home again after some years of wandering. Dooley Wilson, in his quiet way, proved an excellent comedian as the mortal who was the bone of contention between the heavenly forces.

Of the musical numbers, the melody that still remains after the curtain has fallen is Taking a Chance on Love, although the title song, Cabin in the Sky also has a catchy lilt to it. Dem Bones, as a novelty number, is also sure fire.

Katherine Dunham, representing the spirit of evil as Georgia Brown, leads most of the sizzling dancing and proves to be a fiery little number.

Last night's audience enjoyed Cabin in the Sky heartily. Most of them went out humming Taking a Chance on Love. You will be taking no chances on anything by seeing it.

"Cabin in the Sky"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 26, 1940

Ethel Waters Seen

In "Cabin in the Sky"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"COME, come, chillun, Order in de drama school, please." It's Mr. Deshee speakin'. "No doubt yuh recollect der wuz a play called 'De Green Pastures,' cuz I wuz in it. 'N no doubt dos who is seniors or postgraduates will have it recur to yuh dat der wuz some gent'men—nice gent'men, too—away back yonder, and not so away back, called Marlowe, Milton, Goethe, 'n Rostand.

"Well, now, chillun, If yuh jest imagine what dos gent'men sometimes troubled demselves wid when dey was ponderin' on de debbil, and git dat idea sorter mixed up, like in a fish fry, wid de idea of 'De Green Pastures,' yuh may have some notion of what dat new musical play is like which tried to pass a heap of armament, and didn't pass so much at de Martin Beck last ev'nin'.

Thank you, Mr. Deshee. Thank you. You have helped a lot. Because "Cabin in the Sky" is no easy production to review. It has its admirable features. Its settings by Boris Aronson are as uncommon in their imagination as they are in their beauty. Its dancing, as brilliantly directed by George Balanchine and executed by Katherine Dunham and a stageful of writhing negroes, can mount to orgasmic climaxes of extraordinary vigor. Vernon Duke has contributed (along with some routine numbers) music that can rise to such pleasant heights as "Taking a Chance on Love." And, as if all this were

not enough (which it is not), Ethel Waters, one of the truly grand performers of our stage, is on hand, assisted by such capable sopra players as Rex Ingram and Dooley Wilson.

Book-Bound

Even so, "Cabin in the Sky" is a negro musical drama which fails to provide the satisfactory evening it at first promises to offer. It becomes book-bound soon after it has started to retell in terms of "The Green Pastures" the innocence, its story of a morally frail colored man who finally gets to heaven with his wife, when her prayers have won him a six months' reprieve from hell, and both God's and Lucifer's henchmen have

carried on a tug-of-war for his soul.

Perhaps one trouble is that one tires of the overlong struggle between the celestial and satanic delegates. Perhaps another is that the naïveté of the script is too studied for comfort. In any case, when the first half is over, the conflict for "Little Joe" Jackson's soul becomes monotonous. The old idea (thank you again, Mr. Deshee) upon which the plot is based dies long before death finally overtakes the hero and heroine. And with its demise, the show dies, too, even when its performers are exhausting themselves with magnificent activity.

It hurts to report this because Ethel Waters is one of this department's favorites. It also hurts to report this because the first half of "Cabin in the Sky" is very pleasant indeed. But one half of it is more than enough. After Miss Waters' singing of "Taking a Chance on Love," everything seems like an anti-climax. One misses real comedy as surely as one becomes over-exposed to the book.

Miss Waters Excellent

Dooley Wilson is an appealing player. Katherine Dunham is unquestionably in fine form, and an excellent dancer, even if her aggressive coquetry wore some of us out. And Miss Waters is one of the irresistible personalities of our stage. Goodness seems to shine through her. Her smile radiates as "geniality" would if it were spelled out in neon letters.

Miss Waters is, too, an astonishing actress as "Mama's Daughter," proved, and as she makes clear by her treatment of much of what even now she is given to do. She has not lost her mischief, either. Or her abandon as a dancer. Yet all of her greater skill cannot keep "Cabin in the Sky" from ending up as something of a bore and a decided disappointment, especially when one remembers its promising beginning.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 26, 1940

Negro Fantasy

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ALTHOUGH it is, in its fashion, a morality play, "Cabin in the Sky" has a kindly word to say about sin. In fact, it is pretty enthusiastic about it, giving it the best of the argument for most of the course of the new musical show. In the manner of such works, it has a fascinating propensity for making wickedness bright and exciting up to the time for the final curtain, and then in the last moment, coming out strongly on behalf of virtue. In a few words, I think the new musical show is fine when it is going gay in night clubs, permitting the magnificent Miss Ethel Waters to sing a lively song and providing a chance for the alluring Miss Katherine Dunham to go into her somewhat orgasmic dances, and not nearly so good when it tries to be a sort of blackface "Lilliom." Since, however, there is more gaiety than pseudo-morality in "Cabin in the Sky," it emerges on the whole as a lively musical show.

Since the sections of the new work that are just frank and straightforward musical show are so much the best, I think I should tell you about them first. There is, for instance, a vigorous and rather striking score by Vernon Duke and some good lyrics by John Latouche. In particular, a song called "Taking a Chance on Love," as brilliantly presented by Miss Waters, is so gay and charming that one hates to think how the

radio is certain to go to work on it from now on. The next most entertaining pieces are "My Old Virginia Home on the Nile" and "Honey in the Honeycomb," but almost all of the numbers are attractive. In addition, the dancing is brilliant and is a great credit to George Balanchine, who staged it, but most of all to Miss Dunham, who is splendid in all of her numbers. Getting around to such things, the sets by Boris Aronson are helpful, too.

The people are fine, too. Miss Waters is, of course, one of the great women of the American stage, and as the faithful wife of the narrative, she is, as usual, brilliant in both her musical numbers and her acting.

There is no one in our theater who has a more heroic quality than Miss Waters, and she can likewise be wonderfully gay and humorous when her scenes call for it. Miss Dunham is both an exciting young woman and a most provocative dancer, and, as one of the chief representatives of evil in the plot of "Cabin in the Sky," she makes virtue seem additionally dubious. I like her best in that "Honey in the Honeycomb" number. The men aren't bad, either. Dooley Wilson as the weak husband saved from eternal punishment by his wife's prayers; Todd Duncan as the representative of Heaven and Rex Ingram as the agent of Hell are excellent. Incidentally, Mr. Ingram, who plays Lucifer's son in the new show, was the Lord in the screen version of "The Green Pastures," which may prove something or other.

As for the story framework, it is all about the battle between Lucifer Jr., and the Lord's General for the soul of one "Little Joe" Jackson. At the plea of Joe's wife, heaven permits the dead man to return to earth for six months to prove that he can lead a good life. I may add that he has a hard time of it and just makes it in the end. It seems to me that this story, falling as it does between a Negro fable and an attempt to do something so much like "Lilliom" in blackface, is far from successful. It has never the quality of simple race legend nor expert dramatic imagination. It has neither the dignity and sweetness of "The Green Pastures" nor the gay invention of the Broadway musical show. There is something unhappily fraudulent about it all. But then "Cabin in the Sky" gives you a boogie-woogie number in a night club, permits Miss Waters to sing or Miss Dunham to dance, offers a piece such as either "Dem Bones" or "Savannah" and such faults do not seem so important.

"Cabin in the Sky"

Ethel Waters, 'Cabin in the Sky' Are a Hit at the Martin Beck

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 26, 1940

"Cabin in the Sky," musical fantasy by Lynn Root; lyrics by John Latouche; music by Vernon Duke. Produced by Albert Lewis, in association with Vinton Freedley at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, Oct. 25, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THIS "Cabin in the Sky" at the Martin Beck Theatre is what the boys call a natural. They've put The Lawd's General (Todd Duncan), a melodious angel in white (with medals) fighting Lucifer Jr., (Rex Ingram), a jolly devil in red and black, to see which of them can make Ethel Waters happiest as the star of the evening.

Sounds a trifle screwy, and that is what was intended.

Reasonably the Lawd's General has the better of the sentiment and Lucifer Jr. inspires the most exciting entertainment. But by the time they get Ethel and her

Little Joe, a gamblin' man who done her wrong, to the pearly gates the Lawd's General wins with a couple of white nightgowns and a Jacob's ladder.

Lucifer Jr. is sent back to hell to sizzle and ruminate on the ways of men and maids in musical comedy, when they start "slipping thrills to the godly," as Channing Pollock used to say.

Effective Compromise

It wouldn't have been easy to have extracted a success from a musical fantasy with songs, the wiggling Katherine Dunham and a couple of Egyptian ballets from Harlem,

without Miss Waters.

Even as it is, it hasn't been easy to effect a kind of compromise between Miss Waters' dramatic success in "Mamba's Daughters" of last year and her current promoters' belief that, by contrast, she should "get hot" this year.

But some way the thing is managed. "Cabin in the Sky" was a roaring success up to 10:30 o'clock last night. After that, as it got out of Harlem and started heavenward, it lost pace and substance, and the finish was a little weakly reminiscent of Paul Robeson's "John Henry" of last season.

Ethel Waters, the artist, is the lady who pulls "Cabin in the Sky" together and holds it together. She makes its naive fantasy seem worth playing by the perfection of her own simple art. She sings its better songs with skill and that warming natural voice that is nothing if not beguiling.

When they toss her into the center of a Harlem dance hall she loses something of the stage prestige she has won with worthier material, but she still is agreeably in command of the evening.

Show Stopping

She halted proceedings twice, once with a familiar but effective Vernon Duke melody, "Taking a Chance on Love," and again with a lightly caricatured dance in night club character. It is she, I think, who will be drawing crowds to the theatre the next several months.

The Waters support is especially good. Rex Ingram plays the optimistic Lucifer with gusto and a proper satanic effect. Todd Duncan manages to keep the Lawd's General from becoming stuffy. Dooley Wilson is a fine Little Joe, human and weak and likable.

Katherine Dunham is a Harlem siren with all the trimmings. She, too, was a show stopper, with a lively male dancing chorus back of her. The Johnson choir sang beautifully as usual.

The settings, and costumes, by Boris Aronson, are imaginative and interesting. The dance numbers are properly wild; sometimes a trifle orgiastic, in George Balanchine's best Egyptian ballet manner. There was a good deal of applause last night.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 26, 1940

Ethel Waters Heads Players of 'Cabin in the Sky,' a Musical Fantasy With a Negro Cast

By BROOKS ATKINSON

PERHAPS "Cabin in the Sky" could be better than it is, but this correspondent cannot imagine how. For the musical fantasy, which opened at the Martin Beck last evening, is original and joyous in an imaginative vein that suits the theatre's special genius. Lynn Root began it by writing an extraordinarily fresh book about heaven, hell and the common earth where black people work out their destiny. By great good fortune every one associated with him has met him on equal terms. For it would be difficult to prove that the book is happier in style than George Balanchine's lyrical direction or the excellent performance by a singularly well-chosen Negro cast.

Ethel Waters has been essential to happiness in the theatre for some time. But she has never given a performance as rich as this before. She is cast as Petunia, faithful wife of an ingratiating rascal who has the greatest difficulty in walking the narrow path to heaven. Without once stepping out of character or assuming the airs of a star performer, Miss Waters captures all the innocence and humor of a story-book character, investing it also with that rancid warmth of spirit that distinguishes her acting. At the present moment, this theatregoer imagines that he has never heard a song better sung than "Taking a Chance on Love," music by

Vernon Duke, lyrics by John Latouche and voice and acting by Ethel Waters. She stood that song on its head last evening and ought to receive a Congressional medal by way of reward.

According to Mr. Root's darktown fable, heaven and hell are uncommonly aroused over the fate of "Little Joe" Jackson. By strict accounting he ought to go below, for he has been running around with a flighty baggage, shooting craps and behaving outrageously. But he is a likable waif, and Petunia, his wife, is highly regarded in heaven. Chiefly out of respect for her, "Little Joe" has a second chance to acquire vir-

tue on earth. Since Dooley Wilson plays the part of "Little Joe" with a kind of discouraged bewilderment and since Katherine Dunham plays the baggage at a blistering temperature, the triangular frolic is comic, disarming and incendiary by turns and "Cabin in the Sky" ranks with the best work on the American musical stage.

Negroes can act with abandon and with infectious enjoyment when the occasion is right. Rex Ingram, for example, has a gleaming magnificence that stretches the seams of any part he plays. As a parson and leader of the chorus, J. Rosamond Johnson has a beat and a wholesomeness that shake a show into vigorous shape. George Balanchine is an artist enough to appreciate the gusto of the people he is working with in this performance. Musical shows seldom acquire dancing such as he has directed here—motion in many lines set on fire with excitement. If the rules of Equity permitted, probably the dancers in "Cabin in the Sky" would be glad to pay Mr. Balanchine something for the privilege of appearing under his direction, for he has released them from the bondage of hack dancing and ugliness.

As a matter of fact, the joy of creative work shines out of all the corners of Mr. Root's fantastic cabin. Vernon Duke has written racy music in several veins from song hits to boogie-woogie orgies. Mr. Latouche has composed crisp and jaunty lyrics. As scene and costume designer, Boris Aronson has done his finest work, giving to pure imagination many vivid shapes and flaring colors. Put "Cabin in the Sky" down as a labor of love by a group of theatre people who have enjoyed working on something that is bursting with life. Mr. Beck will need plenty of fire insurance as long as "Cabin in the Sky" remains at his theatre.

"George Washington Slept Here"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 19, 1940

"George Washington Slept Here" Comedy Shot at Human Frailty

"George Washington Slept Here," comedy by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart. Produced by Sam H. Harris at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, Oct. 18, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE newest Kaufman-Hart frolic, a comedy called "George Washington Slept Here," which was introduced at a redecorated Lyceum Theatre last night, is one about a timid little man suffering from patriotic urges and a back-to-nature impulse.

It is, I should say, Class B Kaufman-Hart. But their Class B is a shade better than a majority of their contemporaries' Class A. Which is all to the good. "George Washington Slept Here" is smartly amusing, but more than a trifle forced.

In the forcing process the actors, all blessed with talent, have become Kaufman and Hart conscious. Each one knows, that he or she has been entrusted with some pretty clever things to say and doesn't intend to let the opportunity pass without making the most of it.

The result emphasizes spoken lines at the expense of story and character. And this is always a costly proceeding in comedy building.

Newton Buys a Home

Newton Fuller was a natural nature lover. He hated city life and loathed town apartments. His one ambition was to have a real home in the country, and when he came upon an abandoned place down Bucks County

way he up and bought it without even consulting Mrs. Fuller.

Now Mrs. Fuller was a town girl. She loved the smell of automobile exhausts and steaming asphalt and she thrived on window shopping. A lark to her was a bust at the Stork Club and a bird song at sunrise was a pain in the neck.

For two and a half of the three acts into which "George Washington Slept Here" is divided, Mrs. Fuller has a field day as a witty grouser at Sucker Fuller's expense.

The house he buys, where legend has it George Washington slept, not only turns out

to be the one with a dry well and no road right of way, but also the place where Benedict Arnold, and not Washington, passed a night.

The natives gyp Mr. Fuller and the mortgage is about to be foreclosed when a couple of funny things happen, including an extravagant family drinking bout and a recovery of the Fuller status quo.

Good Types

The comedy is, as said, smartly amusing and the characters human types, even when thrown out of focus for the sake of a laugh. The most consistent of the group are Percy Kilbride, playing one of his more laconic hired hands, one who reluctantly gets the gullible Fuller deeper and deeper into trouble, and Ernest Truax as the gullible one himself, a little man with an honest vision and not too much sense.

Jean Dixon is a fine type for the sarcastic and cynical Mrs. F., though the burden of getting the most out of every K and H quip is beginning to haunt her.

Dudley Digges plays an irritating uncle with good comedy results, there is a bit of a boy perfectly realized by Bobby Readick, Ruth Weston visualizes a striking Summer theatre gal, Paula Trueman has a nice character bit as a pregnant maid and Mabel Taliaferro and Richard Barbee walk in and out with a couple of bits that are backed by good training.

The settings are by John Root and completely fitting. Mr. Kaufman's direction is as intelligent as usual, but he does have a time holding his players on the conservative side.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 19, 1940

George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart Satirize a Country Idyl in 'George Washington Slept Here'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS PROPERTY OWNERS in Bucks County, Pa., George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart are now putting their country estates to work. "George Washington Slept Here," which was acted at the Lyceum last evening, is a farce about the rigors of country living. The setting, which John Root has designed, represents the living room of Mr. Hart's luxurious shack with his dining room fireplace filling one end of the stage. Using odds and ends of Hart House as props, Mr. Kaufman and Moss Hart have improvised a vaudeville about the city man who discovers the country. Apart from the actors, who are off the top-shelf, "George Washington Slept Here" is a labored and empty enterprise. Only good taste prevents this column from observing that George Washington could have slept there without missing amusement of any particular consequence.

The intellectuals always suspect Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart of spreading their comedies thin and of using hackneyed plot devices.

Whether they do or not is not a matter of importance if the results are entertaining. But this time the charges fit. For the introductory act is routine wise-cracking, and the plot, when it arrives late in the evening, reaches to the bottom of the barrel for the old mortgage sequence. Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart have gone

through the motions of playwrighting without taking much fresh enjoyment in what they are doing.

Since Mr. Kaufman staged the farce, give them credit for writing in terms of actors. They know how to select actors and how to use them. Ernest Truax, for example, is giving his best performance as the city man afflicted with rural rhapsody. The play skillfully uses the comic emphasis of his diminutive figure playing. As the boring uncle, Dudley Digges is at the top of his form, puffing and chucking with fatuous humor. Although Jean Dixon's part is mechanically monotonous in the first half of the play, she can speak devastating lines with epical force and latitude. When the part gathers human warmth she knows how to communicate it neatly. As the doleful country almanac, Percy Kilbride is vastly amusing. And there are good performances all the way through by Paula Trueman, Ruth Weston, Mabel Taliaferro, Peggy French, Kendall Clark and Bobby Readick.

When these actors are carving little curlicues of humor out of the knots and twigs the authors toss them, "George Washington Slept Here" has a bright look and sound. Good actors provide the satisfaction that comes from seeing and hearing bits well done. But the story of country complaints—of reluctant Nature, casual local labor and week-end guests—is sparing in invention and half-hearted in the telling.

Votaries of wit can still worship at the shrine of "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which is worth a hundred drowsy Washingtons, Kaufmans and Harts.

"George Washington Slept Here"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 19, 1940

'George Washington Slept Here' Opens at the Lyceum Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IF "George Washington Slept Here," which opened at the Lyceum last evening, had been written by a couple of playwrights named Joe there would be occasion today for a moderate amount of adjective tossing. "George Washington Slept Here" would be a mighty funny little play to be written by a couple of playwrights named Joe, and everybody could predict that the boys were going places. "George Washington Slept Here" was, however, written by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, who have already gone places and done things.

They have gone to far funnier places than they go in their new comedy, and done far livelier things. Their glittering past throws a shadow over this section of their immediate present and if the fault is anybody's it is Mr. Kaufman's and Mr. Hart's. They've just taught us to expect too much; have once or twice set their standard of migrant comedy so high that now they stumble over it. "George Washington Slept Here" is just a moderately amusing little play about some people who bought a tumble-down house in Pennsylvania and had troubles in it.

It can hardly be difficult for any one, even for those of us not gifted as are Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart, to imagine the difficulties they encountered. They dug a well for months without striking water and when they did it was somebody else's water. The farm, for reasons not entirely clear to me, simply ate gravel. Japanese beetles ate everything else. The roof leaked and the fireplace smoked and whenever it stormed the

lights went out. Mr. Fuller remained hopeful in the face of all this; Mrs. Fuller bristled with Kaufman and Hart wisecracks. In the second act people came to visit them, including a crusty old uncle who hated drafts, but was generally supposed to be extravagantly rich.

This is thin plot for two acts, and the plotting—that intangible element which makes thin plot seem thick—is noticeably below the standard of the usually inventive authors. A lot of the cracks are as bright as ever, but the spaces in between seem wider. Even Miss Jean Dixon, exercising that dry brilliance of hers in the role of Mrs. Fuller, is left rather too dry at moments by the ebbing plot. Ernest Truex, who can bubble so, has rather to work at it.

The authors mix things up in the last act, which has much of the old pace and the old crackle. (The Fullers nearly lose the place

'GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE'

A comedy in three acts by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart; staged by Mr. Kaufman; setting by John Root; presented by Sam H. Harris at the Lyceum Theater on October 18, 1940. The cast:

Mr. Kimber	 Percy Kilbride
Newton Fuller	 Ernest Truex
Annabelle Fuller	 Jean Dixon
Madge Fuller	 Peggy French
Steve Eldridge	 Kendall Clark
Katie	 Grace Valentine
Mrs. Douglas	 Mabel Taliaferro
Clayton Evans	 George Baxter
Rena Leslie	 Ruth Weston
Hester	 Paula Trueman
Raymond	 Bobby Readick
Uncle Stanley	 Dudley Digges
Lesgett Fraser	 David Orrick
Tommy Hughes	 Edward Elliott
Sue Barrington	 Marian Edwards
Miss Wilcox	 Toni Sorel
Mr. Prescott	 Richard Barbee

in this one, but bluff and double-bluff see them through). Everybody gets drunk, the plot scrambles into farce and the audience almost howls. An act like that would make the reputation of a couple of playwrights named Joe. But from the actual authors of "George Washington Slept Here" we expect three acts like that. This time, I am grieved to report, we simply don't get them.

We get a lot else—sharp lines, pungent insults, a child-pest of the first water, and some admirably droll playing when opportunity permits. In addition to Miss Dixon and, in the last act particularly, Mr. Truex, the droll playing is contributed by such irrepressibles as Percy Kilbride, Dudley Digges, Ruth Weston and Paula Trueman. You could hardly hope for a better cast, with Mr. Digges puffingly outrageous as the wily uncle; Mr. Kilbride gloomily engaging as the hired man; Miss Weston refreshingly caustic as a summer theater actress loosely entangled in the plot. But you could, considering everything, hope for a better play. Something, say, like "The Man Who Came to Dinner."

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 19, 1940

"George Washington Slept Here" Reaches Lyceum

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH "George Washington Slept Here" includes its very funny lings and scenes, it refuses to take its place among the happier products of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart. It can not hold a candle to "The Man Who Came to Dinner." It is not to be mentioned in the same breath with "You Can't Take It With You."

If the evening it provides is slightly less than fair-to-middling, in spite of interludes such as only these two madcap dramatists know how to concoct, the reason is that, with the exception of the hilarious drinking scene which brightens the last act, Mr. Kaufman's and Mr. Hart's new farce remains to its shaky ending a good idea rather than a good play.

What the gifted authors of "George Washington Slept Here" have done is to write about the familiar trials of any city-dweller who, in a rash moment of surrender to the country's spell, has bought an old house—a house of Revolutionary vintage—and taken on the

costly responsibilities of making it livable. But the trouble with their new farce, notwithstanding the occasional fleetness of its wisecracks, is that in it Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart have catalogued the perils of country life instead of damatizing them.

The lack of water, the roof which leaks, the plumbing problem, the threat of the Japanese

beetle, the high cost of gravel, the reluctance of hens to lay, the need of farm trees to be sprayed, the hazards of drilling a well, the difficulties with domestics, the expense of road-building, the dilemma of the rainy week-end—all these and a hundred other rural liabilities are inventoried in vaudeville terms at the Lyceum.

Although an occasional character comes through, such as the brat Bobby Readick realizes in all his peckishness or the old uncle pretending to be rich that Dudley Digges acts excellently, the play's good idea gets lost in thinly realized types, in obvious gags which labor obviously, in a group of young people who do little more than clutter up the stage, and in a plot which falls asleep even before it dies an unnatural death.

A wisecrack is always a joy when spoken by Jean Dixon. Ernest Truex is a likable farceur even when, as in this case, he is working overtime. But most of the characters in "George Washington Slept Here" are as nebulously written as the neighbor Mabel Taliaferro plays. The result is neither the grand fun one had anticipated nor the special fun associated with Mr. Kaufman's and Mr. Hart's names.

Their new farce lacks among other things a point of view. Its authors defend the city or attack the country as mug-wumps. They can write wittily. And they do rise, even in such an indifferent sample of their skill, to the superlative foolishness of their last act drinking scene. But the final comment on their new play is that it is not nearly so amusing as the revival of "Charley's Aunt."

"George Washington Slept Here"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 19, 1940

George Washington Slept Here Thoroughly Enjoyable Play

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Kaufman-Hart combination is in again, this time with a bucolic episode called *George Washington Slept Here*, which chronicles the tribulations of a family man who craves—and gets—a "little place in the country to call his own." It is far more mellow in its nature than *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and far less lunatic than *You Can't Take It with You*. But what it loses in caustic, urban wisecracking it makes up in the more solid substance of its situations and the wider appeal of its humor. Not everybody in the world, believe it or not, knows Alexander Woolcott. Everybody knows Newton Fuller, the sentimental little American who wants just a piece of land.

George Washington Slept Here is a record of the Fuller family, Newton and his wife, Annabelle, and their daughter, Madge, who are hypnotized into taking over one of those windowless, waterless, almost roofless stone houses that dot the picturesque Pennsylvania countryside. The ensuing troubles may be summed up as a search for water, a quarrel with a neighbor who owns not only the brook but the very road that leads from the highway to the house, the attempted elopement of the daughter with a married summer-theater actor, and the usual invasion of

week-end guests, including a prodigal uncle who is assumed to be rich but who turns out to be just another bankrupt.

The Kaufman-Hart *deus ex machina* by which these difficulties are solved is a piece of paper, a map that shows they own not only their own property but nearly all of the belligerent neighbor's including his wells and his road.

Mr. Kaufman or Mr. Hart, or both, seem to side with the wise man who advocated a general anesthetic for all juveniles upon reaching the age of 12 and their reawakening only when they have arrived at 21 or

so. For they have invented a young scoundrel (one of the characters names him well and truly Huckleberry Capone) who is so villainous that even the orchestra customers were hissing last night.

Of the other characters, and with due apologies to Ernest Truex's characterization of the beleaguered home owner, I most enjoyed a farm hand, or handy man, or man-of-no-work, whom the authors call Mr. Kimber and who, in the hands of the solemn-visaged and twangy-voiced Percy Kilbride, became one of the most engaging figures I have met with in some years. Mr. Kilbride puts on this part like a pair of old overalls, and it fits him perfectly. A truly magnificent performance.

Mr. Truex himself happily showing no signs of his recent distressing accident, played with exuberance and captured all the amusing innocence of his role's chief victim of the back-to-the-land movement. He fairly bubbled in the joy of property-ownership; he was courageous and dauntless under the repeated blows showered on him by circumstance; he showed all the wistful qualities of the breed of men who, believing themselves *homo sapiens*, are really *homo sapi*.

Jean Dixon gave an exceptionally appealing performance of the unfortunate wife, and that master of character study, Dudley Digges, was excellent as usual as the impetuous uncle.

The remainder of the company were well cast, with Bobby Readick superb as the nasty little boy and a host of good people, including particularly Helen Weston, Peggy French, Paula Trueman and Kendall Clark, filling in the picture admirably.

George Washington Slept Here is a thoroughly enjoyable play and one full of laughter.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 19, 1940

Rural Picture

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

FINDING themselves in one of their mellow moods, the Messrs. Kaufman and Hart have written a friendly and distinctly pleasant little comedy about city people in the country. Although they have devised for Miss Jean Dixon one of those sardonic roles she plays so triumphantly and have one or two bitter things to say about rural life, the playwrights were obviously feeling benevolent when they constructed "*George Washington Slept Here*," and the result is a play that is benign, rather than astringent. It is pretty mechanical, too, if you want to be captious, but there is so much good-natured fun, such shrewd observation of the strange things existence in the country can do to otherwise sane urban folk and such a quantity of characteristic Kaufman and Hart attractively brittle wit that, combined with the good acting and shrewd staging, an amusing and likeable evening in the theater is provided.

The comic conceits that "*George Washington Slept Here*" offers have been strung together on the flimsiest framework of a plot. This is merely the rueful saga of a little man who longed wistfully and romantically to have a place in the country, and how he got his wish, heaven help him. His wife, it appears, did not by any means share his enthusiasm for the project. The whole idea seemed ridiculous to her, and for a couple of acts the playwrights gave evidence of sharing her distaste. In fact, there were

times when it did look as if the Messrs. Kaufman and Hart had become propagandists and were busy arguing against the summertime trek from city to country. Everything that the authors could devise goes wrong with the home that the unfortunate Fullers had picked out, including the fact that it wasn't really *George Washington* who had slept there at all. It was Benedict Arnold.

Then, just as the Fullers are about ready to lose their home to a nasty neighbor, the authors step in and rescue it. Their method of doing so consists of some mechanical plot manipulations which I cannot praise with any great enthusiasm, but I do admire the sentimental attachment for the old Pennsyl-

vania homestead that illumines the story devices of the last act. Even the sardonic wife breaks down and has a good cry about life in Bucks County, and everything is pleasantly touching. Fortunately there is not too much of that sort of thing. Happily the authors have time to set down such excellent characterizations, observed rather than imagined, as an inefficient hired hand, a temperamental maid and, best of all, a magnificently evil boy, who is understandably compared during the course of the play with Leopold, Loeb and Capone. Then, too, lest one Jean Dixon role should not be enough, the Messrs. Kaufman and Hart have written two of them and wisely cast Miss Ruth Weston for the other one. It makes for such good fun that I didn't bother much about the fabricated quality of the story.

Give Miss Dixon the right sort of role and she is one of the most wonderful actresses in the world. It should be enough to say that she is perfect in the new play. Ernest Truex is back from his Hollywood sojourn to give one of his characteristically engaging and amusing portrayals of a baffled little man. Dudley Digges, stepping into the role originally intended for the late Burton Churchill, plays a pompous fake of an uncle like the fine actor that he is. Miss Weston is splendid as a sardonic actress, in the role that is virtually the counterpart of the one Miss Dixon has. Percy Kilbride, that fine comedian, has his best role as the hired man, and he manages it epically. Miss Paula Trueman gives another of her quietly humorous characterizations as the troubled maid and young Bobby Readick, as the demon child, drew the first audience hisses of the season as a tribute to the mercilessness of his portrayal. The others manage their lesser roles excellently. Incidentally, there is a particularly fine drinking scene in the last act. "*George Washington Slept Here*" is chiefly just a string of incidents, but they are vastly amusing incidents.

"Charley's Aunt"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 18, 1940

'Charley's Aunt,' Dean of the Farces, Is Revived at the Cort Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE'S no way of telling how funny "Charley's Aunt" was in 1892, when it must have pilled its first-night audience in the aisles like cordwood. Not much funnier, probably, than it was last evening at the Cort, where Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner have revived it, with Jose Ferrer in the role of aunty and handsome, comical people clustered all about him. Nothing could be much funnier than Mr. Ferrer and company.

The producers promise that they have followed Brandon Thomas's original script with scrupulous fidelity adding not a word and dropping not a wheeze, I suspect, without knowing anything about it, that they have—and suspect also that it is not so much the script as what you do with it. Mr. Ferrer and the rest make it as broad as it is long. They whoop it up and pack it with funny business. Mr. Ferrer's furious ogling of Kitty and Amy must surely go further, and funnier than the polite customs of 1892 would have sanctioned. Did they thumb noses openly in those days, do you suppose? Did audiences explode when aunty mistook the meaning of "au revoir"? Or didn't they get, as at the Cort we so fortunately get, the opportunity?

Probably everybody knows something of the absurd, incredible yarn in which this byplay is imbedded. It begins in Jack Chesney's rooms at Oxford and Jack and his friend Charley are hosts to lovely girls.

Charley's aunt from Brazil, "where the nuts come from," is due to chaperone, but is delayed. And so Lord Fancourt Babberley, dressed for amateur theatricals in black satin and gray wig, is pressed into service. Mr. Thomas went on from there. There is no describing how he went on from there, with pompous uncles falling in love with the fictitious Donna Lucia, and Lord Babberley's own true love turning up with the real Donna Lucia and everybody racing madly through the Oxford gardens and the false aunty leeringly caressing the prettiest girls. It is crazy fun; it has stretched laughter across the years from 1892 to 1940.

Mr. Ferrer's performance is clowning in the grand manner and as funny playing as you are apt to find around. Now and then,

'CHARLEY'S AUNT'

A farce in three acts by Brandon Thomas; staged by Joshua Logan; settings and costumes by John Koenig; revived at the Cort Theater on October 17, 1940, by Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner.

The cast:
Jack Chesney.....Thomas Speidel
Brassett.....Harold deBecker
Charles Wykeham.....J. Richard Jones
Lord Fancourt Babberley.....Jose Ferrer
Kitty Verdun.....Mary Mason
Amy Spettigue.....Phyllis Avery
Col. Sir Francis Chesney.....

Arthur Margetson
Stephen Spettigue.....Reynolds Denniston
Farmer.....Richard Cowdery
Donna Lucia D'Alvadores.....Nedda Harrigan
Ela Delahay.....Katherine Wiman
Maud.....Mary Frances Hedlin

to be sure, he overdoes it a little. It is possible to overdo even "Charley's Aunt," although obviously pretty difficult. But even when Mr. Ferrer works at it he is hilarious. Nor are the rest far behind. Thomas Speidel and J. Richard Jones are wide-eyed and comical as the Oxford students who struggle at the bottom of the plot. Harold deBecker is a joyous Brassett and Arthur Margetson a delicious Sir Francis. Mary Mason and Phyllis Avery are delightful to look at, and funny, too; Reynolds Denniston, as Stephen Spettigue, is the ideal butt of the final jest and Nedda Harrigan and Katherine Wiman add both grace and charm to the rushing absurdity.

The orchestra does, to be sure, play soft, irritating music through much of the second act. One or two scenes do represent furious pumping from a dried up well of comedy. But these are small flaws in a largely funny evening—an evening all incredible nonsense, and jollity. "Charley's Aunt" is old wine in a new bottle, and an admirable basis for a spree.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 18, 1940

Lady From Brazil

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

BELIEVE it or not, but a production of "Charley's Aunt," that English "Abie's Irish Rose" of the '90s, has reached town, and it turns out to be a delightfully amusing show. It isn't that the ancient Brandon Thomas farce has developed any sturdy artistic values. In itself "Charley's Aunt" is as creaking and as primitive as comedy can well be. The current version is strictly a triumph of acting and direction. With Jose Ferrer, that excellent young farceur, giving what can only be described as a brilliant performance in the leading role, with an excellent supporting cast performing perfectly and with hilariously inventive staging by Joshua Logan, this stage antique returns to as tonalizingly vigorous life, and I think it is certain to become one of the hits of the season.

Needless to say, when I am calling "Charley's Aunt" the "Abie's Irish Rose" of the last century I am not referring to its subject matter. It merely happens to have the quality of staying power, a great deal of the primitive audience appeal and about the equivalent dramatic value of the celebrated Anne Nichols work. Even without Mr. Logan's direction, it would probably be a bit funnier, though. But, happily, "Charley's Aunt" decidedly isn't without Mr. Logan's direction. His is a genuinely operative job of staging. The dangerous tendency is to present these works of an earlier day in a

patronizing and condescending fashion. That is a sin that the current version never falls into. Certainly the play is not taken with any seriousness. But it is played straightforwardly for the comic relish that good acting and good staging can derive from it, and the result is life-giving.

This, if you will permit me to go autobiographical for a moment, is the fourth time I have seen this veteran comedy about the young Oxford man whose friends persuade him to impersonate a lady from Brazil to aid them in their romantic difficulties. The first time was back in 1926 in a very clumsy production at Daly's Sixty-third Street Theater. The second was a silent motion picture starring Sydney Chaplin, and the

third was an early talking film with Charles Ruggles. I can say in all candor that the three versions had in common the fact that they were completely lacking in any suggestion of humor. Now, with the splendid staging and acting that have been provided for it and with the excellent costumes and settings by John Koenig, a thousand bits of shrewd comic business have been devised, a hundred threadbare comic speeches have been given life, and the result can be enjoyed for the good fun that is thereby created.

It is safe to say that there is no more serious business for a comedian to set himself to than to give what he fondly hopes will be an amusing impersonation of a woman. Usually the result turns out to be distasteful, as well as incredibly boring. But Mr. Ferrer is so engaging, as well as so direct and so ingenious, that his characterization of the harassed Lord Fancourt Babberley, dressed up as the aunt from Brazil, becomes a comic achievement that should place him high among contemporary comedians. Whether indulging in the sheer slapstick that has wisely been made so important a part of the play, or managing the less physical aspects of the role, he is a constant delight. The others are excellent, too. Particularly good, I thought, are Arthur Margetson and Reynolds Denniston as the suitors of the pseudo-aunt, and the extremely charming Miss Katherine Wiman as the hero's puzzled fiancée. That, however, is not to detract from the good work of Thomas Speidel, Harold de Becker, J. Richard Jones, Miss Mary Mason, Miss Phyllis Avery, Miss Nedda Harrigan and Miss Mary Frances Hedlin. Who would have thought "Charley's Aunt" would turn out to be one of the hits of 1940?

"Charley's Aunt"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 18, 1940

"Charley's Aunt" Given an Hilarious Revival

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"CHARLEY'S AUNT!" We had thought her dead; long dead; deader than Marley who, as you remember, was very dead indeed. As for Brandon Thomas' old farce we had assumed the only living thing in it was its famous contribution to the bad neighbor policy—"Brazil, where the nuts come from." Vaguely from college we remember seeing it at Boston's Copley Theatre when E. E. Clive was giving—and having—a very good time as the Oxford undergraduate who, when a chaperone is needed, is called upon to masquerade as another student's fabulously wealthy aunt from South America.

But that was twenty years ago. Had anyone told me that today, in this seventh year of Hitler, "Charley's Aunt" could not only prove one of Broadway's most uproarious entertainments but force an audience to laugh so hard that for two hours the sickness of the present could be forgotten and the world would once again seem sane and merry, I would have shaken my head, in your fashion, and accused that person of being the direct descendant of Baron Munchausen.

Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner are the producers who, after a summer theatre success with it, have had the courage to bring "Charley's Aunt" to the Cort. And at the Cort it is Joshua Logan in his direction and, above all, Jose Ferrer as the "aunt" who demonstrate brilliantly that so far as the forty-seven-year old Thomas farce is concerned, there's life in the old girl yet—and plenty of it.

Uproarious Entertainment

Although stock companies, Little Theatres, schools and colleges have, of course, been toying with the play's cast-iron humors these many years, none of us realized until we saw the old farce again last night how resilient are its humors when it is staged with the fleetest invention and acted with irresistible unction.

Mr. Logan has done a superlative job as a director. He has captured just the right quality of fooling. He does not have to condescend to his materials. Their nonsense is apparently without a date. Happily he avoids those tiresome pranks at the expense of the conventions of an older theatre which are the stock-in-trade of spoof revivals. The custard pie he throws is as fresh as if

it were made just before the curtain rose. He knows the world loves a laugh, and laugh after laugh he provides. He has a proper respect for nonsense, however broad. And nonsense—imaginative in its contrivance or bold in its very reliance upon the time-honored devices of good slapstick—he supplies with a vigilant energy that carries everything before it.

Mr. Logan has, moreover, found some charming ladies to wander into the madhouse of his Oxford quadrangles. Mary Mason is a pleasant miss. Phyllis Avery looks lovely and has a lively sense of humor. Nedda Harrigan as Charley's real aunt is both helpful and handsome. Katherine Wiman has the beauty and the radiant coolness of a budding Evelyn Laye. Then John Koenig has costumed these academic intruders with grace and humorously established the period quality of his English background.

Mr. Ferrer Excellent

The men make their contributions, too. Arthur Margetson is a droll farceur. Reynolds Denniston knows his business. And Thomas Spidel and J. Richard Jones add to the undergraduate gaiety. But the evening is Jose Ferrer's as it must, and should, be because, after all, Charley's make-believe aunt is to Mr. Thomas's farce what Hamlet is to another play that refuses to die.

Mr. Ferrer has always been a good actor. "Key Largo," in which he appeared in the prologue as the American who chose to die, was a proof of his serious skill. He did excellent work, too, in "Mamba's Daughter" and "Missouri Legend." Still it seems safe to say few of his admirers were prepared to find Mr. Ferrer give the perfect farcical performance he is giving at the Cort.

Mr. Ferrer has about him the same Puckish quality of mischief Romney Brent possesses. He never loses sight of the all-important fact that guffaws are the reason and excuse for the monkeyshines he is up to. He lets no laugh escape him. His pantomime is eloquent; his fooling inspired; his own high spirits are contagious. Every embarrassment a college boy dressed up as a Victorian aunt would undergo—or cause—he has found a side-splitting way of expressing.

If Mr. Ferrer has a Field Day, so does everyone else. He makes an old farce young. He gives it an hilarious new lease on life. He shows how diverting the simplest, most elementary fooling can be when its simplicity is matched by skill.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 18, 1940

Brandon Thomas's 'Charley's Aunt' Revived, With Jose Ferrer in Title Part

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVERY one at the Cort last evening seemed to be all broken down and unbent with laughter. For "Charley's Aunt," the old rocking-horse farce that dates from 1892, was being played as exuberantly as a man could expect. Last Summer Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner presented it, with José Ferrer in the title role, at the Westchester Playhouse. Westchester County loosened its stays and laughed. Under Joshua Logan's direction, which could hardly be more inventive, Mr. Ferrer is now going through the farce at a hop-skip and jump, which seems to be the right way to plunge through it; and he is admirably abetted by an excellent cast.

Without burlesquing the farce, Mr. Logan has caught a nice accent of knowing enjoyment which acknowledges the hokum of the plot, yet savors the knockabout humor that lies in it. As the two Oxford boys, Thomas Spidel and J. Richard Jones have a startled look that is wholly amusing. The two young ladies are brightly played by Mary Mason and Phyllis Avery with gleaming innocence and mincing gestures. Nedda Harrigan, with

the honest tradition of Harrigan and Hart behind her, knows how to relish a farce of his hand-me-down quality and how to be stunsing in one of John Koenig's decorative costumes. As the third young lady, Katherine Wiman, daughter of Dwight Deere Wiman, is light-footed and dewily ingenious. Harold de Becker, as the butler, has all the tricks of farce convention in his style; and Arthur Margetson and Reynolds Denniston play the two mature gentlemen with the proper coughs,

confusions and blandnesses. In such an ebullient performance it is only fair to toss bouquets in every actor's direction. For this is the most sagacious revival we have had out of the dusty old playbooks; and every one in the audience seemed to be beaming with pleasure.

Nearly every one. For your correspondent, to tell the truth, was only mildly amused. Brandon Thomas's farce is only as funny as you find it. Your enjoyment, no doubt, is conditioned by your previous experience and degree of servitude. And to this correspondent, "Charley's Aunt," even in a genuinely bouncing performance, is only a brighter-than-average campus antic. It would take a cast including the Marx Brothers, Ed Wynn, Bert Lahr, Bobby Clark and Beatrice Lillie to make a brassbound hilarity out of it. Age has its limitations, and "Charley's Aunt" is no exception.

According to the files, it was first played in New York at the Standard Theatre, Thirty-third Street and Sixth Avenue, on Oct. 2, 1892, with Etienne Girardot as the harum-scarum aunt of Charley. On the next morning THE TIMES's critic remarked: "But, farce or comedy, it is without doubt really a play, one that depends entirely on action and situation, not all in the quality of its dialogue, the consummation of the wit or the swiftness of repartee."

Set for 1940. Whether "Charley's Aunt" is uproarious or mildly amusing today, let's agree on two things: "Mr. Logan's direction is first rate theatre work; and Jose Ferrer, who has given several good performances in this neighborhood, is an able and versatile actor.

"Charley's Aunt"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 18, 1940

"Charley's Aunt" Is Revived And There Is Much Laughter

"Charley's Aunt," farce comedy by Brandon Thomas. Revived by Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner at the Cort Theatre, New York, Oct. 17, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE farcical foundations of "Charley's Aunt" are so sound, and so familiar, that it seems to me the Messrs. Day and Tuttle, who revived the farce at the Cort Theatre last night, missed a bet by not trying to modernize it rather than to duplicate its performances of forty odd years ago.

In the old days the less believable a farce was the more hilarious audiences found it. They were trained in the ways of the artificial drama, and expected nothing resembling sanity or reason in their comedies.

Nowadays the best of the farces and light comedies are provided with backgrounds of probability, and the characters are at least vaguely recognizable.

This revival is for those interested in revivals as stage antiques. This group may get as much fun from the Day-Tuttle restaging as did last night's audience—which was smart and youthful.

In the Old Days

Here we have "Charley's Aunt" set back to 1892, when it first was produced in London. Blazer jackets, puffed sleeves, sappy college boys, lunatic old gentlemen, bowler hats and all the rest.

You will recognize all the farce tricks, for many of them originated with this piece and most of them have been repeated in a majority of the farces that have followed.

But the foundation, as I say, is solid and promising. Two college boys who want to have their girls in for tea in their rooms draft a third chum to impersonate his expected aunt from Brazil to act as chaperone.

The fake aunt, getting even with his tormentors, flirts extravagantly with the girls, ties the plot into a variety of farcical knots and isn't relieved of his skit and wig until the joke's played out.

I may be wrong in believing this story could have been brought up to date, but the evening started so promisingly during the first scenes that it seemed a good idea at the time.

The Performance

Jose Ferrer plays the aunt from Brazil, where the nuts come from. He mugs the part outrageously but mostly with hilarious results. He makes a good-looking and jolly old frump, and with just a bit more finesse and a bit less obvious effort his could have been a characterization to remember.

The girls are particularly attractive as stage adornments in the 1890 styles. Mary Mason, Phyllis Avery and Katherine Wiman are a fine trio of ingenues, and Miss Mason a good comedienne as well.

Arthur Margetson makes something almost human of a befuddled army chap and Nedda Harrigan is a pleasantly conservative influence as the real aunt.

Reynolds Denniston had the hard job of being forced to overplay in order to keep in the story. Harold deBecker served well as a man's man and Thomas Spidel and J. Richard Jones were no more innocuous than their director demanded.

Nice settings and costumes by John Koenig. Joshua Logan did the staging in the older manner.

"Charley's Aunt," with Etienne Girardot in the name part, was first played in New York in 1892 and ran three years here and on tour. It was revived in 1906, and played for another two years. In London it has been restaged 29 times.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 18, 1940

Charley's Aunt Revival Triumph in Laughs

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

NOT this season, with the exception of the opening night of Ed Wynn's prodigiously funny show, have I heard an audience laugh so spontaneously or seen it so shaken by mirth as at last night's opening of the Day Tuttle and Richard Skinner revival of that whiskery—and still delightful—old farce of 48 years' standing, Charley's Aunt, at the Cort Theatre.

The subject matter of this antique comedy should be pretty well known to everybody who ever went to a theater, for Charley's Aunt has been played more times, according to statisticians, than any play except Hamlet. Yet, under the agreeable and novel direction of Joshua Logan and with the youthful and accomplished cast that gave its uninhibited best to it, Charley's Aunt proved last night to be actually refreshing.

This is something of a triumph, and the success of the evening was due, first, to the happy co-operation of a company that has been taught to play farce as farce—not as polite comedy—and to play it so earnestly and enthusiastically that the impossible situation upon which it is based becomes believable. There was no cynicism about this performance. It was unashamed.

A second reason for the astonishing amount of fun that was extracted from this museum

piece was the robust performance of Jose Ferrer in the leading role. Mr. Ferrer, who gave us a taste of solemn comedy in the mock heroic drama, Missouri Legend, threw delicacy and caution to the winds and showed us a prankish, mischievous and undismayed "aunt," without a trace of the simpering shyness that some of his predecessors have read into the role. He demonstrated a rare understanding of a medium that has almost vanished, unfortunately, from today's theater.

The company was well balanced, but special tribute should be paid to the feminine side and to those who had the good sense

to cast them. It could not have been entirely by chance that three such lovely girls as Mary Mason, Katherine Wiman and Phyllis Avery should be found in one play. And their attitudes of Victorian delicacy, of timidity and of that wide-eyed and rapid mentality common to young women of the 'teen age were in exquisite keeping with the spirit of the play and the times.

Arthur Margetson and Reynolds Denniston shared acclaim in the secondary roles of Sir Francis Chesney and Stephen Spettigue—both of them accomplished farceurs. Harold deBecker provided a good comic butler and did not, providentially, attempt to overdo the part. Thomas Spidel and J. Richard Jones were the two young Oxoniens, whose love affairs are the basis of the play, and both of them performed amiably.

Mr. Tuttle and Mr. Skinner very wisely, I think, decided to refrain from cutting or otherwise tampering with the text. They let it speak for itself, giving us all the lines and letting the laughs fall where they may. They did not present it, furthermore, with any thought of burlesquing the old days or of insisting that Charley's Aunt is nothing but precious whimsy. The general attitude of the company, in all its direction, seemed to say that here was a brand new, modern play built for solid entertainment.

With this treatment Charley's Aunt becomes funnier than ever, for, in addition to being farce, it is a commentary on the manners and morals of a stilted, unnatural and, through our eyes, foolish age.

Before closing I should, returning to the individual members of the cast, say a good word for Nedda Harrigan, whose laughing characterization of Donna Lucia D'Alvadores is worth the whole price of admission.

Forty-Eighth St., with three good revivals on it, is beginning to be this drama season's life saver.

"It Happens on Ice"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 11, 1940

This "It Happens on Ice" Is a Little Like a Frozen Aquacade

"It Happens on Ice," revue assembled and produced by Sonja Henie and Arthur Wirtz at the Center theatre, New York, Oct. 10, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

ICE shows, as you know if you have ever been to the Madison Square Garden when they were staging one there, sometimes with and sometimes without the marvelous Sonja Henie, are largely pantomime.

Dozens and dozens of beautiful skaters glide in and out, and whirl and dance, or dance and whirl, usually with exquisite grace and smiling assurance, while a light man sprays them with colored sparklers.

An ice revue, like "It Happens on Ice," which began an engagement at the Center Theatre last night, is a Madison Square Garden ice show in miniature, plus Joe Cook and gadgets, Joan Edwards and Felix Knight with songs and Leon Leonidoff deploying a Radio City Music Hall ballet shod with shining steel.

It Is Different

The result is a different kind of entertainment than any we have before seen in a theatre. Norman Bel Geddes has built the Rockefeller a grand little ice rink where the stage of the Center used to be, and where seven or eight rows of the orchestra seats also used to be.

(He took in all the critics' seats, inci-

dentally, so the gentlemen of the press were spotted in the mezzanine balcony last night, which is also a fine location to see from).

In the revue Mr. Cook offers a familiar Joe Cook routine, punctuating the ice numbers with enough laughter to justify his job. But Joe is a little out of his element on ice. The skaters sort of push him around, even without intending to. And so does the director. But he will work into the spirit of the entertainment in a day or two. His old club juggling act was a help to him last night.

The skaters are as wonderful as you might

expect them to be. Particularly the Caley sisters, and Hedi Stenuf, who comes from the other side and could wear a lot of Olympic medals pinned to her chest if she wore anything on her chest to pin them to.

And a handsome young fellow named Lloyd Baxter (Skippy to his friends). And a smart little trick named Le Verne. And Gene Berg and Meryl Baxter. And Jo Ann Dean. And Mary Jane Yeo.

It is difficult to separate them as to skill. They all seem incredibly graceful and agile. Some, I suspect, do a couple more twirls than others. But I couldn't say.

Nice Ballets

There are two or three elaborate ballets. One, "Your Presence Is Requested," is a grand ball in black and white. I thought it was stunning. And another concerned with a hunt in the forest and the romance of a swan, as Joe Cook explained, who came to life when the Prince kissed her and was prepared to be registered as Mrs. Smith after that.

Miss Edwards and Mr. Knight sang what threatens to be a hit song, "The Moon Fell in the River"—"when I kissed you last night"—think of that—and Miss Edwards added another likely number entitled "Long Ago," to accompany the black and white ball number.

Mr. Geddes' lights and costumes are satisfying in coloring and his setting, which includes a long ramp rising from the ice surface down which the skaters slide, is effective.

You might not agree that "It Happens on Ice" is something to rave about, and probably it isn't. But it is at least something to talk about a lot, and that should keep it a show feature the better part of the season.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 11, 1940

Joe Cook Appears in "It Happens on Ice"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

SONJA HENIE and Arthur Wirtz have given their huge, costly, often beautiful spectacle at the Center a title almost lethal in its accuracy. "It Happens on Ice" does take place on ice. Ice is its setting; ice its source of wonder; and ice the unrelenting villain that renders the evening tedious.

Although Joe Cook, one of the great performers of our stage, is present with some of his best inventions and happiest lunacies, he too is ice-bound. His Cheshire grin loses its warmth in the chilling depths of such a house. The cold rink upon which he now performs causes frost-bite to overtake his liveliest patter. Even he cannot quite thaw out the proceedings.

Grace there is, abundant grace, in this mammoth Hans Brinker carnival which the program describes as a "musical extravaganza." There is also beauty—the undulant, swift-gliding beauty of skaters whose skill is brilliant, whose motions are effortless, and whose daring is matched only by their precision. Then

there is the loveliness, genuine and beguiling, of Norman Bel Geddes' costumes, which are models in variety, color and imagination, and in some of the better uses this same Mr. Geddes has made of the Applia-like levels of his impressive inner stage.

But a little skating goes a long way. Oddly

enough it goes a much longer way in a theatre than it does at the Madison Square Garden. Skaters, however masterly, soon begin to be the victims of their skates. defy them as they will, they cannot shake them off. They are slaves of the very blades they use so wonderfully. They have no other choice than to seem to repeat themselves.

Their suppleness may be extraordinary; their grace without limit; their skill as boundless as the frozen north. But there is a restricted medium. The uniformity of their excellence breeds monotony. One tires ultimately of being amazed by them. And when amazement has vanished, when the wonderful has soon established itself as a commonplace, why then the very audacities of skaters can begin to seem strangely tame.

If "It Happens on Ice" resembles a frosted version of "The Aquacade" gone indoors, Mr. Rose must still be congratulated. He has been wiser by the clock in exhibiting his swimmers. One hour is enough for a swimming show. Two hours and more of skating is much too much. No floor of ice, however miraculous, innovative, or expensive; and no curtain of glass, even if it does contain some \$15,720,000 glass fibers and does not burn or stain, can hide this sorry fact. Even Joe Cook cannot do this. I doubt if Sonja Henie herself could, had she chosen to appear in the huge show she is now co-sponsoring.

Amazing as are Lloyd Baxter and Hedi Stenuf and the whole corps of superlative Brinkers, and lovely as are some of the effects, the production ends up by being a frozen asset. Thank heaven for the sake of the theatre that Lisa and the bloodhounds had no skates. The drama would have been robbed of a lot of excitement.

"It Happens on Ice"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 11, 1940

'It Happens on Ice,' With Joe Cook, Opens at the Center Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PROBABLY no animal has more grace than the human, if you put the human on skates, and always providing that the human selected is one of those fortunate ones who can stand up on skates. With blades under him, the expert can teach balance to the cat and effortless insouciance to the bird. He can swoop in perfect circles with the barest tensing of a muscle; the tiniest push of a toe sets him swirling like no top that ever was.

You may observe much more than human agility now at the Center Theater, where "It Happens on Ice" opened last evening. They have frozen over the whole of the Center's expansive stage and built slippery planes down to it. They have engaged some of the most precocious boys and girls of the skating world to do their extravagant capers. The most untutored of them can easily perform the impossible and the really accomplished—the Caley sisters, say, and Hedi Stenuf and Mary Jane Yeo—can do tricks which stagger the mind. Beside all of them the best of the dry land dancers seem heavy and muscle bound. They also seem pleasantly human.

There is something abstract about such

skating as they are doing in the extravaganza at the Center. It is distant and mathematical; an adventure in pure aesthetics. After the first few minutes none of it seems quite real, except possibly Joe Cook. Joe Cook enters on his own feet, just when you had begun to suppose that no one was stodgy enough to use feet any more. He makes jokes like a natural man—not very good jokes, on the whole, but still something the mind can get hold of. Mr. Cook, making jokes that aren't terribly good and exploit-

'IT HAPPENS ON ICE'

An ice show in two acts; staged and devised by Leon Leonidoff; settings, costumes and lighting by Norman Bel Geddes; choreography by Catherine Littlefield, assisted by Robert Lindem; musical director, Erno Rapee; lyrics by Al Stillman; songs by Vernon Duke, Fred E. Ahlert and Peter de Rose. Presented at the Center Theater on October 10, 1940, by Sonja Henie and Arthur Wirtz. In the cast are Joe Cook, Hedi Stenuf, the Caley Sisters, Le Verne, Jo Ann Dean, Mary Jane Yeo, Lloyd Baxter, Gene Berg, Dr. A. Douglas Nelles, the Four Bruises and others.

ing comic inventions which ridicule perfection, is soothingly human.

Along with the skating, people sing now and then. Their small, distant voices impinge faintly on the vastness of the Center Theater and the lyrics and music of their songs tinkle distantly. Then some more perfect skaters come out and skate some more, doing almost precisely the things which the perfect skaters who preceded them had done. The costumes change and no doubt the performers, but you couldn't prove it by me. As far as I am concerned, all of "It Happens on Ice" is mechanically perfect, and pretty to look at for a while and very, very far away. There seems to be something about skates that makes even a pretty girl vanish coldly into the abstract.

"It Happens on Ice" is beautiful in its fashion, and now and then—thanks to Mr. Cook—faintly amusing, and it is obviously sufficiently expensive. And if I seem to be implying that it is beautiful but pretty dumb I am, for once, getting precisely the effect I am aiming at.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 11, 1940

Cook on Ice

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

ALTHOUGH it is a lavish and handsome ice show that has been installed at the Center Theatre, the big news there this morning is that Joe Cook is back with us. While "It Happens on Ice" is filled with young, good-looking and athletic boys and girls of innumerable races, performing miracles of graceful agility on skates, it is the great Cook, no male Sonja Henie if you come right down to it, who is the bright, shining star of the occasion. Skating, even as brilliantly done as it is in the new revue, tends to pall after the first hour, but Joe Cook has the true comedian's virtue of getting even better as he goes along. Whether leading his latest Fuller Construction Orchestra, running a crazy restaurant, jousting with a trick reindeer, juggling with old-time skill or just chatting amiably with the customers, Mr. Cook continues to be the delightful comic he always has been, and I would have enjoyed "It Happens on Ice" far more if it had contained more Cook and less skating.

Not that I have anything against the fine art of skating. Chorus formations, ballets and acrobatic numbers on ice have both charm and beauty, and even though I might have trouble in telling Mary Jane Yeo from Jo Ann Dean and Le Verne from Hedi Stenuf, I admire the skill of all of them to an enthusiastic degree. In addition, "It Happens on Ice"

offers great pictorial loveliness in Norman Bel Geddes's settings, costumes and lighting, and achieves high standards of visual beauty time after time. I cannot help suspecting, however, that even the finest skating tends to become monotonous and that the variety possible to the masters of this particular art is decidedly limited. Great ingenuity has been employed to give at least the simulation of variety, but during the second hour I, for one, became so anxious to see a comedian that I would have settled for some lesser personage than Joe Cook.

The Center Theater is so large a playhouse that it would seem to offer great problems for

Mr. Cook, who is intimate and friendly rather than spacious and distant in his comedy. But there is no vanquishing a Cook so easily, and it did not take the Sage of Lake Hopatcong long to vanquish the unfriendly reaches of this vast theater. Even if he were not the prodigiously funny fellow that he is, he would be a great comfort to all of us through the warm geniality of his singularly winning personality. In "It Happens on Ice" he takes us into his confidence from the start and it is not long before he has made the Center Theater seem for the time being an intimate playhouse. It is a pleasure to report, too, that his juggling seems better than ever and that he is surrounded by a properly sane crew of associates, even for those of us who still long to see Dave Chasen at his side.

Mr. Cook is not the only non-skater in the cast of the ice revue. Miss Joan Edwards and Felix Knight come out from time to time to do a little singing, but since the music that has been devised for the new show is less than exciting, their contribution to the evening's entertainment is not enormous. The rest is skating, and since skating shows seem good enough for Madison Square Garden, they should be good enough, I suppose, for the Center Theater. Personally, I wish that the skaters in "It Happens on Ice" had been used in the manner in which the girls and the vaudeville acts are employed in the Ed Wynn show. In a word or two, I would like to have seen them come on occasionally while the star comic was resting, instead of working it the other way around. But if we must have ice show, it is well to have them as beautiful as the new carnival at the Center Theater and it is wonderful to have Joe Cook in them.

"It Happens on Ice"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 11, 1940

Sonja Henie's Ice Show an Eye-Capturing Pageant

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT MIGHT be questioned whether a skating carnival in semi-theatrical form belongs to the department of drama, ballet or winter sports, for Sonja Henie's spectacular new production at the Center Theater has elements of all three fields and gives emphasis to none. It is a glittering, colorful and eye-capturing pageant; it cost thousands to produce; its settings and costumes are brilliant. And I am going to be ungracious enough right here to say that an hour of it is enough for me.

For all its glitter and rapid motion *It Happens on Ice* is curiously static, and once the eye has been filled until there is room for no more the performance becomes repetitious and, to me at least, tiring. Perhaps we miss Sonja Henie's personality, for the great star of the ice is not skating this year but is supervising the show from a mezzanine seat. Perhaps the mechanical difficulties that seemed to overwhelm the stage crew last night had something to do with it. Perhaps the show is overlong.

Then there is the matter of Joe Cook, the eminent inventor, juggler and fable teller. Mr. Cook is in fine and genial humor. Some of his funniest gadgets are called into action and some of his funniest stoges are on hand; yet last night it appeared to many of us as though he were performing through the wrong end of a telescope, and Mr. Cook needs a small,

intimate theater for his whimsical confidences.

With these complaints duly registered we can pass to pleasanter thoughts. None of man's various methods of locomotion, with the possible exception of flight, contains so much of the grace and poetry of motion as expert ballet skating, and Miss Henie's company is one of experts. It is headed by the graceful Hedi Stenuf of Vienna, who, like Miss Henie, has come into the professional field by way of the Olympic games. Twelve years of ballet study, combined with her skating practice, have given her exceptional co-ordination, and her sole work was highly interesting.

For greater inspiration, however, I would turn to Miss Le Verna (first name kept secret

on the program), whose dance rhythm in two numbers, *Don't Blow That Horn, Gabriel*, and *The Ice Has It*, was breath taking. The other exceptionally clever artists were Dorothy and Hazel Caley, whose "duet" stopped the show. On the male side considerable prominence is given to Lloyd (Skippy) Baxter, who is also making his professional debut after a long career in the amateur skating ranks. Mr. Baxter was at his best, it seemed to me, in a ballet called *The Legend of the Lake*, although many of his other numbers were more intricate and perhaps more difficult in the matter of leaps and pirouettes. It was this ballet, by the way, that most nearly approached the classical dance form.

From the scenic standpoint Norman Bel Geddes contributed some smashing effects, but the height of his effort was reached in a gorgeous black and white setting that dominated the second half of the show. It was in this setting, too, that Miss Edwina Blades, an English girl had her great opportunity to show why she has been a continental favorite, and she accepted it beautifully, with the aid of Mr. Baxter.

The music in general was paced to the requirements for fancy skating and had little distinction except in one instance. Mitchell Parish and Peter de Rose have written a number called *The Moon Fell in the River* which is haunting in its melody. The singing, by Joan Edwards and Felix Knight, is about what one would expect between pictures at Mr. Rockefeller's other amusement center across the way.

Mr. Cook's gadgets and he himself are as cheerfully amusing as ever, and it is a pity that he seems lost in the icebergs far, far up in Mr. Bel Geddes' frozen north.

For unspoken wit, however, I refer you to a little item called *Goldlocks* and the three bears, skated or danced by Mary Jane Yeo, Arthur Nelles, Kenny Williams and Paul Castle. Whoever devised that number had a fine sense of humor and the skaters executed it to perfection.

With all these fine things in Miss Henie's first producing venture it is distressing to report that it leaves me cold, mentally and perhaps physically, but that is the unfortunate fact.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 11, 1940

'It Happens on Ice' Brings Skating Indoors at the Center Theater in Radio City

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BY REMODELING the patient and obliging stage at the Center Theatre again they have managed to bring skating indoors in Radio City. "It Happens on Ice," they call it in the program, although they call it "a musical icetravaganza" in their public relations, and they opened it with floodlights in Sixth Avenue last evening. At some time there may have been more beautiful skating than Hedi Stenuf contributes to this ice revue, although this reporter never happened to see it. But it is probably safe to assert that skating never before had such a gorgeous production.

For Norman Bel Geddes, the protean scene-designer, has created a cool, silvery production under lustrous lighting; and Leon Leonidoff, the protean director, has staged a production of modern enchantments. Where quite a number of orchestra seats used to be,

an ice-covered stage sweeps out into the auditorium, and some of the finest skaters in the world, beguilingly costumed, skim swiftly across the glazed surface like demi-gods. Skating is motion that is full of exultation. The speed seems to give the curves and pirouettes a lean, spinning loveliness. And

skating breeds an extraordinary race of attractive boys and girls with long, slender legs and pliant bodies. There is never anything in the show-shops much more beautiful than the ballet entitled "Legend of the Lake," which Miss Stenuf, Lloyd Baxter and a large supporting cast skate with matchless skill, or the formal ball that Edwina Blades and Mr. Baxter skate in the second act.

This is not the whole story. Even the finest skating in large doses induces a sort of unappreciative drowsiness that is not becoming to the theatre. To counteract the soporifics of skating appreciation, Joe Cook, the good old skater of the revue stage, makes several ingratiating appearances. A small boy at heart, he comes with several truckloads of insane gadgets and some sound knockabout stoges; and, without raising his voice, Joe manages to introduce some chuckles in the midst of the grind of sharp skates on the ice.

To do Joe full justice, the Center Theatre is considerably too large. "It Happens on Ice" never gathers him up into the carnival mood of a revue. And the songs by Vernon Duke, Fred E. Ahlert and Peter de Rose do not make much impression on those stately spaces.

For "It Happens on Ice" is dedicated to the nimbleness and grace of sharp, steel runners. As a designer, Mr. Geddes is a man of impeccable taste and heroic imagination. In the great, silvery spaces of his production some splendid skaters are translating motion into fleet beauty. It is not much like the old frog pond where most of us awkwardly began with double-runners.

"Boys and Girls Together"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 2, 1940

'Boys and Girls Together,' Mostly Ed Wynn, Opens at the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ED WYNN still wears his preposterous fur coat and tells incredible stories with no particular beginnings and no ends at all. He also shoots from guns with curved barrels, and hisses and perpetrates puns which make the senses reel. Everything is perfectly all right with Mr. Wynn, who carries on business at the old stand, giggling and making faces. He is just as funny as if he hadn't been away at all.

He came back last evening at the Broadhurst in a show, of course of his own contrivance, called "Boys and Girls Together." He brought Miss Jane Pickens,

whose graceful artificialities bring a proper note of contrast to Mr. Wynn's own artful artfulness, and the De Marcos to dance and Dave Apollon to play his mandolin with a look of anguished rapture. He also brought a fine convey of dancing girls to keep things moving while he is resting his voice. Bits of scenery and a tune or two round it out, providing an evening of folkie merriment.

Mr. Wynn has never, I think, been more hilarious. There is his look of shocked amazement when he first encounters his image in a mirror—a baffled astonishment, mingled with

chagrin and embarrassment and ending in a nervous giggle. There is his arrival in a small boat, wearing the costume—I guess—of a Chinese mandarin. There is his sublime description of the drama he was going to put in the show, but somehow didn't, and it compares admirably with the account of a movie plot he gave once, years ago. There is his bicycle-piano which, in this instance, has Miss Pickens on top of it, singing the best of the songs which Jack Yellen, Irving Kahal and Sammy Fain have written for her. (It is called

'BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER'

An entertainment in two acts, produced and staged by Ed Wynn; lyrics by Jack Yellen and Irving Kahal; music by Sammy Fain; settings by Oden Waller; costumes by Irene Sharaff; talk by Mr. Wynn and Pat C. Flick; choreography by Albertina Rasch; produced by Mr. Wynn on October 1, 1940, at the Broadhurst Theatre. In the cast, in addition to Mr. Wynn himself, are Jane Pickens, the De Marcos, Dave Apollon, Marjorie Knapp, Walter Long, Edna Sedgwick, Jerry Cooper, the Six Willies, Lucienne and Anshour, Paul and Frank La Varre, Sally Craven, Florence Foster and others.

"Catsup On the Moon," and it would have been fine if the Messrs. Yellen, Kahal and Fain could have thought of some more like it.)

There is, in short, Mr. Wynn, the classic sanny, twisting new jokes and reviving old, getting tangled up with acrobats and earnestly insisting throughout that what he really has here is an unusual show. He hasn't, of course. "Boys and Girls Together" is usual, down to the last arrayed show girl, representing the spirit of the Stork Club and of 21. (Comments, however, by Mr. Wynn.) Shows don't have to be unusual if they have Mr. Wynn in them, since he is unusual enough for twenty. "Boys and Girls Together" is casual and a little haphazard, made handsome by the glittering De Marcos, melodious by the charming Miss Pickens, lively by the dancing girls and very funny by Mr. Wynn himself. At 1:45 when it ended that had been enough to keep all of us bright-eyed and happy in our seats. You don't have to be any more unusual than that, Mr. Wynn.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 2, 1940

Ed Wynn in 'Boys and Girls Together' With Jane Pickens, Dave Apollon and the De Marcos

By BROOKS ATKINSON

JUST suppose, for example, that Ed Wynn is the funniest man in the world. That seems to be a reasonable assumption on the basis of "Boys and Girls Together," which brought actors and audience together at the Broadhurst last evening. After appearing with some difficulty in a "book show" three years ago, Ed has returned to the itinerant pattern of "The Laugh Parade" and "Ed Wynn's Carnival," which always suited his style of random mountebankery.

Around him he has collected a good outfit of entertainers. Jane Pickens is singing Sammy Fain's music in a most attractive voice. Dave Apollon plays the mandolin like a virtuoso and the De Marcos sweep around the stage in some stupendous dance numbers. Some of the town's most stunning show girls are wearing Irene Sharaff's stunning gowns, and the chorus is composed of some fresh young people who look as if they came from good families.

But all performers lead a somewhat restricted life when the perfect fool has collected enough jokes and back to put on a show. For he pops out of a costume trunk in the first number and ambles through almost every scene. Dressed in one crack-brained costume

after another, he gives the whole entertainment a kind of story quality. Seated on his magic carpet, he takes you into the fabulous land of foolishness.

Ed does not change much through the years. Oh, he is a little heavier now and a little more ponderous, perhaps, on his feet. But those inquiring eyebrows still curve above a lantern-jaw, and the bushy hair, which is just a trifle thin on top, frizzes out from his clownish face. He still hisses. His hands wander around in gestures of bewilderment. His eyes convey pleasure and astonishment by turns. When

his associates are performing at breakneck speed, Ed surveys them with the apprehension of a slow-witted old woman, interjecting approving gasps or chuckling with enjoyment.

How his fellow performers feel about it may be another thing. Although Ed maintains a kind of paternal interest in them, the fact remains that he horns into nearly every act. But it is pie in the sky for people, like this reporter, who think that Ed is a one-man circus. For the ambling gait suits his style of informal comedy. He knows how to tell a joke. He builds it up with a foolish emphasis upon the inconsequential. Then he drops in the tag line with the casual air of an after-thought.

He has some wonderfully elaborate gags, all with a story-telling flavor. When he wants to indulge in some trick shooting at an unruly target, he comes to the point gradually. He makes his entrance paddling a boat, looking at his road map to find the direction, and throwing out an anchor which presently starts coming down from the sky. By the time he gets around to the shooting you have already had a comic voyage up the Sound.

Watch Ed edging into a tangled act with the La Varres, who are acrobats. Ed's intentions are helpful when he tries to disentangle the acrobatic knots. But presently he realizes that he is caught in one himself. His heavy jaw drops in astonishment. Staring at the audience, he tries to solve the problem mentally. He swings one leg over, tangling himself worse than ever. He turns around, straightens up. Gradually it dawns on Ed that there is no solution to this predicament. Probably he will be entangled with an acrobat for the rest of his life, which is a dismal prospect.

If is all very foolish, all very funny. For Ed is a perfect fool out of a demented volume of Mother Goose, and "Boys and Girls Together" is an uproarious one-night's entertainment.

"Boys and Girls Together"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 2, 1940

Wynn Reaches Climax in His New Revue

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to have time, space and the capacity to write a book today about Ed Wynn, the magnificent zany, who last night deposited upon the stage of the Broadhurst Theater the largest single load of joy that has reached Broadway since the depression. For nothing short of a book would do him complete justice.

In the 30 years since Ed Wynn first disclosed his extraordinary and wholly individualistic talents to audiences, nearly every superlative has been worn to tatters in describing him. And today finds us still reaching for new and better words. Mr. Wynn has arrived at another climax.

It is difficult to place a critical finger upon the exact point where his past performances, great as they were, leave off and this new one begins. Certainly there is nothing new in his mad method. He is the same ingenious, naive, giggling, disarming and lovable fool of old. He wears the same motley succession of weird garments. A strange variety of hats continues to ornament his crown. There is still the air of perpetual astonishment on his wide-open face. He continues to have embarrassing moments with self-conscious hands. And he never fails to burst into amused chuckles over the old wheeze or the new gag he is about to relate.

That sounds, indeed, like the Ed Wynn of

other days, and it is all truthful. But what cannot be described is a new spirit of gaiety, as though Mr. Wynn had suddenly discovered an untapped well of humor and was so tickled by it that he simply had to share the huge enjoyment of it with his audience.

The truth of the matter may be that the showman's spirit in him is satisfied with the show that surrounds him, for it is a great show and he should be happy with it. There is, happily, no "book" to Boys and Girls Together. As its title suggests, the revue is nothing more complicated than a gathering together of boys and girls who can sing, dance, make love and look beautiful. Nobody, least of all Mr. Wynn, has to worry about a plot. Mr. Wynn acts as a master of ceremonies to tie the separate acts together. The separate acts

also serve, after a fashion, to tie Mr. Wynn together. Mr. Wynn makes up his own story as he goes along, giving modest credit in the official billing in the unusual phrase "talk by Ed Wynn and Fat C. Flick."

From the moment he emerges from a packing case, dripping with moth balls, until he dismisses his audience at approximately midnight, he is almost constantly on the stage. He indulges in acrobatics with the La Varre brothers. He plays an accordion with the excellent Dave Apollon. He rides a tricycle piano (one of his own inventions) and plays it to accompany the gorgeous Jane Pickens in semi-operatic dumbness. He climbs a stepladder and catches Indian clubs bunched at him by the club-swinging Six Willys. He is a constantly astonishing man.

If it seems that undue emphasis is being laid on Mr. Wynn's part in Boys and Girls Together, let it be said that this dazzling performance does not throw any shadow over the excellent surroundings. With him, for example, are the De Marcos, who are an evening's entertainment in themselves, whether in a saloon, at a supper club or on the stage, and they have never been better. Miss Pickens and Mr. Apollon, too, have their shining moments, and if I have any regret at all it is that the one-time Palace hero's place on the program is so late in the evening.

Pickens, on the other hand, is with us almost from the beginning, which is as it should be. Of the younger dance teams, Walter Long and Edna Sedgwick should be popular, for they are vivid and youthful. Sally Craven and Florence Foster deserve mention for their more classical dances, and there are also a couple who call themselves Lucienne and Ashour, who do an Apache dance with an unusual climax, and who are magnificent in their comedy.

The list of talent is long. Almost as long as the show which, as you may have gathered, is long enough and complete enough to be considered really a double-feature for the price of one.

You may have discovered, by this time, that I am very fond of Mr. Wynn's show.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 2, 1940

Ed Wynn Excellent in His New Musical

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ED WYNN keeps on insisting at the Broadhurst that "Boys and Girls Together" is not a usual show. And he is right. No production in which he appears is, or can be, a usual one. His presence alone is a guarantee of this.

Mr. Wynn is a magician in the happy realms of nonsense. His lisp is the song-hit in any of his musicals. Few costumes are as eye-filling as is his repertoire of tattered coats and inexplicable hats. His eyebrows, as they kiss or desert the sky above his spectacles, can set a stage as few designers can. His famous old shoes are the best of sentimental numbers. His chuckle, which is more whiny than laugh, is the perfect orchestration for any pun. His madly inter-twinning hands are more active than any chorus numbers.

Then there is the kindness of the man. It, too, must find a place in even the most hurried catalogue of his well-known virtues. Kindness happens to be his manifest destiny as a comic. The enormous laughter he provokes is utterly without malice. He is foolish for

foolishness's own sweet sake, droll rather than witty, and as lovable as he is daffy.

Mr. Wynn, the Incomparable

That his is an inventive genius, no one can question who in the past has rejoiced in any of his Rube Goldberg contrivances. He can pun with machines as readily as he can play

with words. And always the goal, avowed and achieved, is merriment.

In "Boys and Girls Together" Mr. Wynn may disappoint some of his admirers by not indulging his mechanical prowess as fully as he has hitherto done. If he fails to make smoke come out of his ears, he does, however, demonstrate that as an originator of novel ruses he has produced some secret weapons which do terrific damage to the rivalries. His suggestions for a cigarette lighter are not to be scoffed at. Neither are his hints for a plot synopsis. These are but a few proofs, picked out from among many, that the Maestro of Nonsense has lost none of his uncanny skill with words, gadgets, and effects.

If his skill remains the same, so does his generosity. Although he works unsparingly in "Boys and Girls Together," throughout most of the evening Mr. Wynn is acting as a super-Master of Ceremonies to a vaudeville show which his personality manages to endow with a plot. Among those present are the De Marcos, dancing with their fiery and magical grace. Jane Pickens looks and sings nicely. Eight startlingly beautiful show girls give genuine distinction to the chorus numbers. Dave Apollon plays upon the mandolin with uncommon skill. If Oden Waller's settings are good enough, Irene Sharaff's costumes are downright brilliant.

But the evening is Mr. Wynn's, as anyone not in his wrong mind might have known, and certainly hoped, it would be. In spite of some slow moments, it is a good evening which becomes much better than that whenever Mr. Wynn is on the stage. This, praise be, is almost all the time. That should be recommendation enough.

"Boys and Girls Together"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 2, 1940

Ed Wynn and a Lot of "Boys and Girls Together" Wow an Audience

"Boys and Girls Together," musical revue assembled by Ed Wynn, with lyrics by Jack Yellen and Irving Kahal; music by Sammy Fain; dialogue by Mr. Wynn and Pat C. Flick. Produced by Mr. Wynn at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, Oct. 1, 1940.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

ED WYNN has been saving up for this one. "Boys and Girls Together," which he offered at the Broadhurst Theatre last night, is right out of the old Ed Wynn notebook, which he has been carrying for the last three years, and in which he has been jotting down everything from gags to inventions, from long suggestions to production numbers, from puns to possibilities.

The result, it seems to me, is about the best revue we have had on Broadway in years. At least it gives us the best of Wynn in person, and the best of the Wynn ideas in performance. There isn't an offensive line in it, or an off-color suggestion.

Every one of its acts is a quality act, and each of its scenes is worth the staging.

That makes it what, as Master of Ceremonies of his own show, he tells you he wanted it to be—a most unusual entertainment. Nothing hackneyed, nothing trite—except, naturally, when he offers an imitation of an imitation just by way of contrast.

Dave the Gypsy

He was introducing Dave Apollon, a virtuoso of the mandolin, as I left him last night. By way of providing a setting he had retrieved a gypsy campfire he said, from an old Shubert production. He squatted wonderfully by the side of the campfire while Mr. Apollon

did things to his mandolin strings that probably no other virtuoso is able to do.

I would not know about that, nor care greatly. But the point is that Wynn, at 11:15, was still working with his specialists to add the extra ten per cent. of entertainment that most revues, and practically all stars of revue, miss.

Previously he had worked with the acrobats, as is his outrageous custom, and with the dancers; even with the club jugglers, whom he had put in just to give the second half a vaudeville opening.

He had worn all his funny hats and most of his funny coats. He had stood at the side of the stage and viewed the work of the gifted

children of his troupe with the incomparable Wynn mask, which expresses every known emotion, from a proud father's pride to an apprehensive zany's fear.

Beauty, Too

He had kidded Jane Pickens, his really gifted prima donna, about her singing, and all but broke up an Apache dance with his suggestions to the lady on how to be even with her brutal partner. He had staged a rehearsal ball satire that covers the field from the perfect tapping of Walter Long to the graceful adagios of the superior De Marcos.

He had introduced the eight most beautiful show girls lined up back of the local footlights since Florenz Ziegfeld and his "Follies" left us poorer for their passing. "The Cocktail Girls" he calls them. He had introduced Sally Craven, Edna Sedgwick and Florence Foster, to make you believe that every other dancing girl in a stage full of them is a ballet star.

In fact he had done everything he could think of to make your evening worth what it cost you. If you are as much of a Wynn fan as I am you will be enthusiastic about the result. If you're not—well, I'm not the boy to suggest your musical comedy comedians for you.

Sammy Fain wrote most of the music. Jerry Cooper, a likely lad from radio, sings the hit song, "I Want to Live," in a radio setting. He and Miss Pickens have a nice number, "Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of"; Miss Pickens does nobly by a Spanish item, "The Latin in Me," and the settings for all these, by Oden Waller, are attractive.

Albertina Rasch staged the dances with the dependable Rasch effects, and Irene Sharaff did the costumes with the Sharaff eye to taste and beauty. A swell show, this "Boys and Girls Together."

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 2, 1940

Ed Wynn

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

THE news in this corner will be extremely cheering this morning. Ed Wynn is back in town with his newest carnival, and, whatever may be the state of the world elsewhere, there is every reason for happiness along Broadway. The great philosopher, inventor and well dressed man is once more at the top of his form, running his show with his customary aplomb, giggling with characteristic embarrassment, mingling with the girls, the singers, the dancers and the acrobats and in general behaving as the superb comic he always has been. Since it is the custom in such cases, Mr. Wynn is accompanied by a show, and since that show features those incomparable dancers, Renee and Tony De'Marco, it is an entertainment to be cherished. But, as usual, Mr. Wynn is so wonderful and so complete a carnival in himself that the rest seems an unnecessary luxury.

As usual, the Wynn hats are incomparable specimens of millinery, and the Wynn costumes are marvels of the tailor's art. As usual, the great man wanders through his show in a proper philosophical vein, telling us of this and that in his best fluttery manner and demonstrating to us once more that, whatever else may be wrong with the American Theater, its first-night comedians are the greatest men

in the world. I doubt if there is any one who doesn't love Ed Wynn as a comic. He is not only hilariously and imaginatively funny to a superlative degree, but manages to be so incredibly engaging that he captures the affections of his audiences as readily as he does their laughter. In his new show, which is attractively entitled "Boys and Girls Together," he is, if anything, even more delightful than ever.

Being the wisest of philosophers and commentators, Mr. Wynn has an unbeatable way of atoning for even the less-than-exciting numbers in his show. He is always in there ex-

plaining what is to come with characteristic eloquence and he assures us with proper conviction that his is a new type of show. Then, when he gives you something conventional in the way of girl-and-music antics he advises you that this is the sort of thing not to be found in "Boys and Girls Together." He is so persuasive that I invariably believe him and so we all must have imagined one or two of the episodes. Rather, let me go on to tell you of the innumerable wonders of the new entertainment. There is Mr. Wynn getting mixed up with a pair of acrobats, Mr. Wynn going hunting with some unusual weapons, Mr. Wynn putting down a carpet for his girls to walk on, conducting a dancing school and doing almost everything else from mingling with some jugglers to setting the stage for the first De Marco dance.

It is my firm conviction—and I am certainly not alone in it—that the De Marcos are the greatest of dance teams. Their few numbers in "Boys and Girls Together" are miracles of grace, charm, imagination and gaiety, and they would give distinction to any show in which they appeared. Prominent in the cast are Dave Apollon, Miss Jane Pickens and Jerry Cooper, who seemed to have a great number of admirers on the opening night. Personally, though, I preferred some of the lesser members of the company, such as the pair billed as Paul La Varre and Brother, the acrobats who entangle Mr. Wynn, or the remarkable fat girl named Dot Remy or even the Six Willies, who are, of all things, jugglers. There is also a well staged chorus number in the Wynn dancing school, and the music is serviceable, though undistinguished. The important thing, though, is that Ed Wynn is being as diligently as ever and to as excellent effect.

'Johnny Belinda'

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 19, 1940

Elmer Harris's "Johnny Belinda" at the Belasco

By JOHN MASON BROWN

SUCH soiled soap-bubbles as he has hitherto blown in "Young Sinners" and "A Modern Virgin" made it seem unlikely that a folk-play, however inept, would ever emerge from Dramatist Elmer Harris's clay pipe. But "Johnny Belinda" is such a play—at least by intention.

Although Mr. Harris has abandoned the sophisticated villagers of Long Island or their equivalents for the simpler sea-bound folk of Prince Edward Island off Nova Scotia, and his characters now laboriously say "Mither" instead of hesitating to mention "Mother," Mr. Harris's metamorphosis as a dramatist is not as complete as it might seem.

In spite of the burrs in his dialogue and the supposedly Scotch sobriety of his writing, it is still of arms and the woman that Mr. Harris tries to sing. Threatened virtue continues to provide him with his theme. This time his heroine is not an over-ripe Southern peach or a city siren forgetful of Bishop Manning's frown. She is a poor, hard-used, deaf-mute. But even before a helpful doctor has taught her the sign language, her innocence has suffered a typical Elmer Harris setback.

Although the formerly smiling Mr. Harris

is just now as serious as if he were writing "John Ferguson," the only original thing he does as a dramatist during an evening, at once lugubrious and hackneyed in its melodrama, is to inflict upon his heroine the curse of being a deaf-mute.

Heroine Without Words

His choice of such a girl as his more than threatened heroine is as felicitous as the female herself is unfortunate. Her plight not only saves Mr. Harris the labor of writing speeches for her but spares an audience the

cliches which (on the basis of the dialogue he has assigned to her fellow characters) he would undoubtedly have heaped upon her.

Once only does this luckless maiden speak during the evening. This is as the final curtain falls on a court-room scene in which, after being acquitted of murder, she gains speech upon being reunited with her baby. Then, calling her child by its name, she says, "Johnny."

Before this, misfortunes have settled upon her to the accompaniment of paper snow, wind machines, and a mortgage falling due. To be more specific, Mr. Harris's heroine has been at first abused by her gruff father who, after he has come to love her, is struck by lightning. She has been raped by the cad she ultimately shoots. An attempt has been made by some good old stock village gossips to separate her from her illegitimate child. Moreover, these same gossips have ruined the practice of the good young doctor who has taught her the sign language and brought her the only happiness she has ever known. Far and wide they have spread the lie that he is her baby's father.

Had Mr. Harris's Belinda been articulate throughout the evening, the faults of Mr. Harris's script would have been even more clearly exposed than they are. As it is, due particularly to the radiant poignancy of Helen Craig's silence and the grace of her pantomime, her scenes in dumb-show—even her lessons in the rudiments of the sign language—can claim a certain grim novelty and pathos. But her muteness alone is eloquent.

Edward Craig is excellent as the gruff old father. And Horace McNally plays the good young doctor sincerely, though too softly. The others range from fair to less than indifferent. In the hands of another dramatist "Johnny Belinda" might easily have been better. It might have been good. It might even have been passable.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 19, 1940

Sign Language

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

ACCORDING to the new play called "Johnny Belinda," there was an attractive young deaf-and-dumb girl living on Prince Edward Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia, and she was taught the sign language by a sympathetic doctor from the mainland. Unfortunately, her education was somewhat interrupted when she was assaulted by the handsomest seducer on the island. Her father was pretty much annoyed by the rape of his daughter, but he became quite sympathetic about the resulting child just about the time he was unhappily struck by lightning. Then the evil seducer tried to take the child away from the girl, but she got out the family shotgun and killed him. Of course, no jury on earth would convict her, and, just at certain time, she was paroled in the care of the young doctor, who loved her all the time.

As you can see for yourself, the new play by Elmer Harris essentially offers us one of the oldest plots in the history of cheap melodrama. It contains all the clichés of its shopworn school of dramatic writing and it leaves out nothing in the way of tried and familiar thrusts at the emotions. It is shameless in its sentimentality and it seems, indeed, rather proud of it. The curious thing, how-

ever, is that by the mere fact of making the heroine deaf and dumb and putting the clichés in the sign language, the author has managed to give his play an undeniable sort of primitive audience interest. An antique stencil of dramatic writing is none the less an antique stencil of dramatic writing because it is first given by signs and then slowly interpreted by the doctor, who once worked in a sanatorium for deaf mutes. But somehow this particular device does make it more bearable.

As a matter of fact, after you have

watched a couple of acts of romantic dumb show between hero and heroine, with even the upstanding old father finally getting the knack of the thing, you begin to look upon every one in the cast that doesn't know the sign language as being automatically a scoundrel. In the final scene, when all the surviving actors get pretty noble at the trial and even the heroine manages to say a word, you find that ignorance of the signs for cow and marriage really doesn't make one a villain, and this discovery comes as a pleasant surprise. As long as "Johnny Belinda" is confining itself to the episodes between the girl, the doctor and the father it manages to be rather touching, but once the villains begin plotting to steal the child from the heroine, things get too thick and you recall that "Johnny Belinda" is just trash after all.

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If the new work, for all its antique melodrama, manages to capture not only considerable audience interest, but even moments of dignity, the credit goes entirely to Miss Helen Craig, who plays the hapless heroine. It is a remarkably touching, honest and sensitive performance that Miss Craig brings to her role, and she achieves the unusual feat of making the characterization not merely a tour de force but a genuinely credible and sympathetic portrait of a pathetic and gallant human being. Miss Craig gives even the shoddiness of the melodrama a saving honesty. There is likewise a good performance by the veteran Louis Hector as the slow-witted but eventually compassionate father, while Horace McNally manages the difficult part of the sympathetic doctor credibly. The sign language cannot make "Johnny Belinda" a good play but, for two acts, it does make it a bearable one.

"Johnny Belinda"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 19, 1940

'Johnny Belinda,' Feverish Melodrama Opens at the Belasco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

SET down in black and white and looked at coldly, the plot of Elmer Harris's "Johnny Belinda" will curl your hair, probably into ringlets. Mr. Harris is a great one for action and the larger, more primal emotions, especially lust, mother love and the proud wrath of fathers whose daughters are dishonored. "Johnny Belinda" has quieter virtues in addition, and at the Belasco, where the play opened last evening, the cast makes the most of them. Performance lays a soothing hand on the feverish forehead of Mr. Harris's melodrama.

Probably, however, nothing less than an ice pack would have served. Mr. Harris's melodramatic temperature runs very high indeed. He lays his action on Prince Edward Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia, and his heroine is a deaf and dumb girl who is discovered laboring in a grist mill. She is discovered by a violent young fisherman and rape ensues in the twinkling of an eye. This is known as plot. But a young physician comes to the girl's aid, raises her from an almost animal existence, teaches her sign language and eventually falls in love with her. He saves her from a beating at the hands of her rough but good-hearted father, who plans to chastise from her the name of her betrayer. When her father is killed by a bolt of lightning—there are few half-measures in Mr. Harris's plot—the doctor comforts her. When she kills the villain to protect her child the doctor defends her in court and draws from the king's bench not

only acquittal but a warm vote of approval. Mr. Harris lays it on.

And, oddly enough, this is a good way from being as bad as it sounds. As a whole, of course, "Johnny Belinda" is far from sensible drama. Disbelief accumulates amid all this violence and the extreme predictability of the plotting practically eliminates suspense. But there are still strange little glimpses of something real, momentary scenes which are unexpectedly affecting. One grows to suspect that the author has run across people rather like these somewhere, and seen them with some sympathy and understanding, and then made up altogether the wrong story about them.

Certainly as acted by Helen Craig, who doesn't speak a word until precisely the moment you know she is going to speak a word,

'JOHNNY BELINDA'

A play in three acts by Elmer Harris; settings by Frederick Fox; lighting by Feder; directed and presented at the Belasco Theater on September 18, 1940, by Harry Wagstaff Gribble. The cast: Mountie.....Beau Tilden
Hector McQuinn.....Edward Craig
Mrs. Lutz.....Leslie Bingham
Dr. Jack Davidson.....Horace McNally
Floyd McGuigan.....John Delmar
Jimmy Dingwell.....Ralph Cullinan
Fergus McGuigan.....Frank Delmar
Grace Peters.....Valentine Vernon
Mrs. McKee.....Bertha Belmore
Locky McCormick.....Willard Parker
Stella Maguire.....Jane Bancroft
Pacquet.....Jules Epally
Belinda McDonald.....Helen Craig
Black McDonald.....Louis Hector
Andy McPherson.....Beau Tilden
Lizale Gordon.....Margaret Cherry
Maggie McDonald.....Clare Woodbury
Rev. Tidmarsh.....Jack Lynds
Defense Counsel McVail.....William Chambers
Attorney-General McKnight.....Bram Nossen

The Judge.....Henry McWhirry
Clerk of the Court.....Blaney Harris
Matron.....Vicky Delmar

the character of Belinda is often touching. Miss Craig's pantomime is not always subtle, but there is warmth and feeling in her acting. Horace McNally plays the role of the ministering physician with restraint and with a kind of convincing gentleness, and Louis Hector makes a formidable, but essentially appealing, father. If a playwright is going to have villains like Locky McCormick, a course which would not recommend, Willard Parker is the man to play them. And some of the numerous character parts are nicely played and rather shrewdly written.

You can't get away from Mr. Harris's plot, however. And heaven knows you want to.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 19, 1940

'Johnny Belinda' Is the Story of a Man Who Is Going to Marry a Dumb Wife

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that "Johnny Belinda" has reached the stage, there may not be enough drama left to last through the rest of the season. Elmer Harris has shot the works in one evening at the Belasco Theatre. The mortgage is in it; also seduction, child-birth, death by lightning, murder by shot-gun, a snowstorm, a Canadian Mounted in scarlet uniform and a court room scene. As minor diversions Mr. Harris throws in a lesson in grinding grain on a water wheel and a scene with a spinning wheel. Being a thorough workman, he also includes the kitchen stove and the kitchen sink. There has seldom been such a complete play on any stage.

Sometimes this department reluctantly suspects that Mr. Harris lacks inner refinement. During the past eleven years he has bestowed upon us quite a number of plays—"Young Sinners," "Stepping Out," "Ladies All," "A Modern Virgin" and "Marriage for Three" to

say nothing of his dramatization of "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" last Spring.

This time he has come to town with a novelty. His heroine is a deaf mute who

communicates with the other actors and the audience in sign language. She is the daughter of a gruff miller on Prince Edward Island, where the folk customs are quaint. If young Dr. Davidson had not come into her life she might have gone on forever in the dust and darkness of a mill, wondering, poor thing, what the normal world is like. But he takes an interest in her, and starts teaching her the sign language at the same time that a neighborhood scoundrel foully seduces her. Both things make considerable difference to her. They also keep Mr. Harris's play busier than ten plays with a troupe of slack-wire walkers thrown in.

Mr. Harris has almost got hold of something here. The scene in which the dumb drudge learns to communicate by the sign language is genuinely absorbing and fascinating. Helen Craig plays the part extremely well, and Horace McNally as the doctor does all right, too. But "Johnny Belinda" starts sliding down hill and shifts into the running broad jump from that moment.

It has been directed by Harry Wagstaff Gribble, author of the spoof-show "March Hares," and director of the impish "Black Crook" in the days of the Hoboken foolishness. Both those plays were good training for his current masterpiece. Louis Hector gives a vigorous performance as the dour master. Willard Parker plays the menace creditably, and Jane Bancroft acts the thankless role of his wife. There is more scenery than you can shake a paint-brush at, and Feder has lighted it like all get-out. Elmer Harris has exhausted the art and craft of the drama.

"Johnny Belinda"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 19, 1940

"Johnny Belinda" Effective Drama of Deaf Mute's Tragedy

"Johnny Belinda," drama by Elmer Harris. Produced by Harry Wagstaff Gribble at the Belasco Theatre, New York, Sept. 18, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

A GOOD deal of obvious theatre material has gone into the writing and staging of the drama called "Johnny Belinda," shown at the Belasco theatre last night. But Elmer Harris, the author, and Harry Wagstaff Gribble, the producer, have made a good job of its use.

There is an impressive lot of good acting in the play's performance, too. Effective acting, that is, kept free of the blatant and oratorical exhibits such drama invites.

As a result last night's audience had a good old-fashioned emotional evening in the theatre and was honest enough to admit it with a healthy outburst of approval at the play's end. Which, I think, is the sort of demonstration that is helpful.

Good Acting

Mr. Harris' story, and Mr. Gribble's production, gives you an opportunity of seeing Louis Hector, one of the drama's finer de-

pendables, as the blundering father of a deaf mute who gets into trouble and shoots her way out of it in a crisis. His is a happily restrained and agreeably untheatrical characterization.

Also you will see Helen Craig, playing the mute with a good deal of intensity and grace, and making her emotional appeals moving

and simple. She talks mostly by signs, and is practically submerged in sympathy.

Clare Woodbury adds a short part that is perfectly detailed, and a newcomer, Horace McNally, plays a sympathetic doctor who provides plot and romance without slipping too close to the sentimentally banal.

It all adds up to effective theatre, whatever the cynics may think of it. The deaf mute heroine lost both hearing and the ability to talk following a fever attack at the age of one year.

Suffering Belinda

Living with a group of semi-primitives in Prince Edward Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia, she grows up to become the drudge for a widowed father, is befriended by a young doctor who has worked among deaf mutes in Montreal and is finally brought successfully through a terrifying adventure.

It is the sort of play that, badly staged, would quickly fall apart and become maudlin and dull. As it stands in this instance, being well done, it should have a good chance of finding an approving public.

In the cast supporting roles are capably played by Jane Bancroft, Jules Epally, Ralph Cullinan, Bertha Belmore, Valentine Vernon and John and Frank Delmar.

The settings by Frederick Fox are modestly elaborate and properly in the melodramatic mood. The lighting is well handled by Feder.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 19, 1940

New Play, Johnny Belinda, Is Adventure in Acting

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE seduction of a deaf mute, which must certainly be rated as the ultimate in criminal depravity, is the basis for a new play by Elmer Harris, called Johnny Belinda, which Harry Wagstaff Gribble presented last night at the Belasco Theatre.

It is a peculiar play, providing an adventure in acting which finds Miss Helen Craig doing a remarkably appealing characterization of the deaf and dumb girl, and finding her voice at the last act curtain to speak her only line in the script. Beyond that it seems to possess no qualities that would arouse more than passing interest, and as a clinical work I am afraid that it must be ranked with that strange experiment of last year that was called Christmas Eve, and that featured the birth of a child before the eyes of the audience.

It is perhaps a little blunt to say that the before-mentioned seduction was the actual basis of Mr. Harris' play, because, I imagine, he didn't intend it that way. What he thought he was writing was a story of progress in the education of an afflicted girl and the blossoming of love as an accompaniment to it.

Unfortunately, these very good intentions

seem to have become tangled up by an eagerness to crowd the stage with quaint and needless characters, by an overdose of melodrama, and by a host of amateurish and artificial devices to keep the main story alive.

Mr. Harris' setting is in Prince Edward Island, and why that particular locality should have been chosen I do not know, unless it was for the purpose of introducing a variety of dialects which New York actors could hope to master.

As though to compensate for the silence of his heroine, when at last she appears, Mr. Harris keeps events tumbling along in loquacious

bursts from his other characters, and out of the welter of words you discover that there is a new doctor in town, that he is a fine fellow, that Black McDonald has a Cinderella-like daughter who does back-breaking work at his grist mill and is known as "the dummy"; that Locky McCormick, a farmer-fisherman, is the town's bad boy and much given to lechery.

It is not until we know all these things, by word of mouth, that the stage is set for the play to begin, and by that time it is getting well along toward 10 o'clock.

The succeeding events are that Locky McCormick seduces Black McDonald's daughter and then marries another girl; that the good doctor teaches the sign language to Belinda McDonald and discovers her secret; that Black McDonald is (rather unnecessarily, it seemed to me) killed by lightning; that Belinda shoots Locky to pieces when he tries to take her baby from her; that Belinda is acquitted by the most humane court I have ever seen under British jurisdiction; and finally that Belinda is taught to speak her two words of joy and will soon become the good doctor's bride.

What interest there is in this higgledy-piggledy assembly of occurrences is almost entirely concerned with the doctor's methods of teaching Belinda the art of communication through signs, an illuminated lecture, so to speak, in which I thought that both Miss Craig and Horace McNally, as the doctor, did well. Miss Craig has captured the puzzled, questioning expression in eyes and features that is so characteristic of those unfortunate and the rapt intensity with which they strive to penetrate the barrier between themselves and the world of sound.

Others who were helpful were Ralph Cullinan, as an old maid, Louis Hector, as Black McDonald, and Clare Woodbury in another character part.

"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 12, 1940

'Hold On to Your Hats,' With Al Jolson, Opens at the Shubert

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AL JOLSON came back last evening and sang some of his old songs and some new ones for the folks. The ten years he has been away haven't changed him much. He is still funny and rhythmic and unabashedly sentimental by turns, his lips still quiver with emotion and there is a special vitality in everything he does. He is still, in his own way, pretty grand. His show, which is called "Hold On to Your Hats," is all right, too.

It gives Mr. Jolson range, does "Hold On to Your Hats," which may be seen at the Shubert. In the genial palaver of its plot it turns him from radio singer into reluctant broncobuster, from broncobuster into bullfighter, from bullfighter into an improbable and swaying senorita. He is also a fruit peddler in a wig and he conquers the villain and wins the girl. Mr. Jolson certainly gets around in "Hold On to Your Hats." So does the plot, without ever asking to be taken seriously—without ever dreaming that it will be.

It is probably enough to know about the plot that in it Mr. Jolson is, basically, the Lone Rider of the radio, in which capacity he carols "hi-yo, Goldie" and collapses in terror at explosive sound effects. But out in Arizona they believe his every word and the strange denizens of a dude ranch persuade him to come out and catch a bandit—a mighty mean Mexican bandit. After tribulations, and comically enough, Mr. Jolson succeeds. That's enough about the plot, probably. Its gyrations give Raoul Pene Du Bois opportunity for colorful sets and to dress the pretty girls in fabrics snipped judiciously from the rainbow.

Mr. Jolson makes his own opportunities in his jovial fashion. With Martha Raye of the puckered face and the hearty comedy, he sings about how things are "Down on the Dude Ranch," while Bert Gordon, who has incredible ears and other aptitudes of comedy, assists. He sings "There's a Great Day Coming, Manana" and, again with Miss Raye, "Would You Be So Kindly." All of these are very nice, although perhaps none so essentially Jolson songs as those he sings, by request, along toward midnight when he professes to think the critics have gone home. You don't get rid of critics that easily, Mr. Jolson, when there's fun going.

There's fun going all the time, or most of it, in "Hold On to Your Hats." It may not be a show you will remember to your dying day, but it is big and bright and gay, with pleasant music by Burton Lane and amiable lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and a comfortable book. It has also Jack Whiting and the

'HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS'

A musical comedy in two acts; lyrics by E. Y. Harburg; music by Burton Lane; book by Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis; costumes and scenery by Raoul Pene Du Bois; book staged by Edgar MacGregor, dances by Catherine Littlefield; presented at the Shubert Theater on September 11, 1940, by Al Jolson and George Hale. The cast:

Sierra	Margaret Irving
"Slim"	Gil Lamb
"Lon"	George Church
Pete	Jack Whiting
Mamie	Martha Raye
1st Duetette	"Jinx" Falkenburg
2nd Duetette	Joyce Matthews
3rd Duetette	Thea Pinto
Sheriff	Lew Eckles
Fernando	Arnold Moss
Lone Rider	Al Jolson
Radio Announcer	John Randolph
"Shep" Martin	Joe Stoner
"Old Man" Hawkins	Marty Drake
"Concho"	Bert Gordon
	(The Mad Russian)
Sound Effects	George Maran
"Dinky"	Russ Brown
Shirley	Eunice Hesley
Luis	Sid Cassel
Pedro	Will Kuluva
Rita	"Jinx" Falkenburg
The Tanner Sisters	Betty Tanner
	Martha Tanner
	Marty Drake
The Radio Aces	Lou Stoner
	Joe Stoner

alarmingly limber Gil Lamb and fine, fresh, new-season girls. But best and most of all it has Mr. Jolson, back from limbo.

Everybody was glad to see him last evening and whistled and cheered. Mr. Jolson, beamingly, whistled back, and took the audience into his confidence. Everything was relaxed and cheerful—Mr. Jolson, "Hold On to Your Hats" and even, for all its bids and tuckers, the audience.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 12, 1940

Al Jolson Returns in "Hold On to Your Hats"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT TOOK Al Jolson "in person" to remind some of us last night of what an extraordinary entertainer he really is. His throaty hymns to Mammy may in memory have become easily resisted. But Mr. Jolson in person and in action is quite a different proposition.

The people who can match his personality in our theatre are rare. He is at once host and performer, minstrel and crooner, hero and autobiographer. Even if Martha Raye, that uproariously rowdy mammal with the trenchlike mouth, and Jack Whiting, who is Ponce de Leon's rival, and Bert Gordon, "The Mad Russian" of radio fame, with his schooner ears, and many-chorus girls, and something of a book were not on hand at the Shubert, "Hold On to Your Hats" would still be a satisfactory show in Al Jolson's own rights.

From the moment of his first entrance, when he settles down on a chair centre-stage to talk directly to the audience, he establishes his pre-eminence and banishes formality. He is the perfect master of ceremonies not only for the musical in which he is appearing but for himself. As a confidence man to Jolson, he spills his public secrets with a breezy surety belonging to a vanished race of vaudevillians.

His eyes shine like two black moons when a gag is coming or an innuendo stands in need

of illumination. His lips and voice tremble as readily on sentimental cues as if they were dancers going through a well-known routine. Whether he is prattling about his sonny boy, his father, his hotel, the races, Mr. Willkie or Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Jolson's first and last concern is keeping his audience with him. And with him it is.

He can get laughs with the ease with which a magician extracts rabbits from an empty hat. Stir memories, too. And warm the heart. The book to "Hold On to Your Hats" is an interruption Mr. Jolson does not take too seriously. It has to do with a gun-shy crooner, known as "The Lone Rider," who

Mr. Jolson at the Bat

The book of "Hold On to Your Hats," though ailing and routine, passes the time pleasantly enough at moments. Whenever it gets too much in the way, Mr. Jolson wisely puts it behind him as the childish thing most musical comedy books are anyway. Miss Raye takes knowing. At the outset she seemed lost last night. But after she and Mr. Jolson had had their fun, and given as much, with a dialogic slip good enough to be kept in, if indeed it is not already well-preserved, Miss Raye increased in comicality until her goofy abandon won her many royal, and deserved, salutes of laughter. As a radio Indian Mr. Gordon of the wind-swept ears also grew in humor as one grew accustomed to him.

The evening, however, is Mr. Jolson's, as everyone knew and hoped it would be. And a very agreeable, generous evening he was. It, too. At about eleven-ten, he happily discarded the book and started singing some of the songs he has made famous. At this moment, and for many moments thereafter, "Hold On to Your Hats" ceases to be merely entertaining and becomes downright exciting, in the pleasantest sentimental way. Last night "April Showers," "Swanee, You Make Me Love You," and "Sonny Boy" were some of the old songs Mr. Jolson revived. He sang them as only he can sing them, with an unctious and surety that are hard to match. He sang them as freshly as if he had never sung them before. But for those of us who knew better that was part of our joy. We liked having the embers blown.

Here, as elsewhere during the proceedings, Mr. Jolson made us realize that he has been absent from Broadway for much too long a time for everyone's comfort. It is good to have him back.

finds himself in the real cowboy west-compelled to capture a genuine bandit. Thereafter this saga comes to life in Mexico for no good reason in the second half, when the same crooner must once again confront the same bandit, who, after being bombed, is miraculously resurrected for plot purposes.

"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 12, 1940

"Hold On to Your Hats" Brings Al Jolson Back to Broadway

"Hold On to Your Hats," musical revue with book by Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis, lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and music by Burton Lane. Produced by Al Jolson and George Hale at the Shubert Theatre, New York, Sept. 11, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE welcome for Al Jolson, who returned to a Broadway stage last night for the first time in nigh onto ten years, may not have exceeded that singing comedian's expectations, but he should have found it satisfying.

With confidence in their loyalty, and a co-producer's natural interest in the box-office, Mr. Jolson made it possible for the Jolsonites of other years to prove their liking for him by depositing \$8.80 a ticket for the better seats at the Shubert box office.

His admirers met the challenge with enthusiasm. Not only was the theatre filled, but there was a circle of standees at the orchestra rail at least three-deep at its points of vantage.

The ten years have not changed Mr. Jolson greatly. Added a certain roundness to his features, it may be, but taken nothing from the mellowness of his voice nor the joy with which he projects a tune, or tells a suggestive story.

At the end of the evening he was to sing a certain number of the remembered Jolson songs—such as "April Showers," "Sonny Boy" and if demanded, the long popular "Mammy."

Pleasant Memories

Your correspondent was called away before

the recital started, but a report by phone indicates that if he had been of a mind to fill all the requests shouted at him he could still have been at that pleasant occupation.

"Hold On to Your Hats" is quite in the Jolson tradition, being a collection of burlesque gags, brightly staged ensemble numbers, pleasant tunes and skillful dances.

There isn't much that can be done with that particular pattern that has not been done before. The trick is to do it well enough to minimize if not to hide its obviousness.

In this instance there is a fleeting bit of inspiration in the comedian's pretending to be the widely popular Lone Ranger of the air waves. Comes a situation in which the candy

cowboys of a dude ranch come East to engage the Lone Ranger to do a bit of bandit hunting for them.

The satire quickly loses point, however, and thereafter the entertainment is a matter of music cues and dancing interludes.

Martha's Hit

The contributors make the show. Naturally Mr. Jolson is its chief attraction. Martha Raye, however, is practically a co-star, or was last night. The lady of the wide open countenance and the resilient nature proved a great help, stopped the show on occasion and started it all over again during the Jolson testimonial. Her clowning suggests a natural spontaneity, she is inventive and good fun.

Singing "Down on the Dude Ranch" with Mr. Jolson and another gift of the air, one Bert Gordon, who used to double as the Mad Russian of Eddie Cantor's program, Miss Raye is what could rightly be termed a scream.

Mr. Gordon, a Willie Howard type, also had his moments. Jack Whiting and Eunice Healey take care of the duets. "The World Is in My Arms" being their leading bid.

There is a harmonizing trio of Tanner girls that has a supreme advantage in looks over most similar trios, and another three, including two Stoner boys and Marty Drake, who also sing well.

Until the competition stiffens, "Hold On to Your Hats" adds a spicy seasoning of personalities to the current list of musical shows.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 12, 1940

First Minstrel

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

SINCE this is evidently to be a theatrical season devoted chiefly to musical shows, it is only fitting that Al Jolson, the First Minstrel, should start the procession.

It has been ten years since Mr. Jolson was last with us, ten years in which he has been wasting his time in various eccentric activities, and it is a pleasure to welcome him back where he belongs. For there is no getting around it: Al Jolson remains, after all of these seasons, a master showman and a brilliant entertainer who can put over a song in incomparable fashion and manages to give any show in which he appears an amiably informal atmosphere that is of vast help to the high spirits of the occasion. He can make you feel you are participating in a pleasant party; and that is a quality difficult to capture and decidedly worth capturing.

For the purposes of the record, it must be put down that the name of the new Jolson show is "Hold On to Your Hats" and that it is about a timorous radio cowboy who is forced to go West and pursue a Mexican bad man. All of this, however, is fortunately of little importance. The important thing is that Mr. Jolson is the Jolson of old and that his vehicle gives him a proper chance to demonstrate his gift for showmanship. He never does get around to putting on black-face and it isn't until the finale that he

sings all of his classic songs, but even when putting over the new numbers that E. Y. Harburg and Burton Lane have written for him or chatting with the audience or pretending to ad lib with the members of his supporting cast or carrying on what there is of a plot, he does it with such ease and deft assurance and knowledge of all the tricks of his business that he is invariably a comfort. As a matter of fact, I think he has even mellowed a bit since he was here last.

The most prominent member of the supporting cast is Miss Martha Raye, late of the cinema. In the movies Miss Raye always seemed to me one of the most distressing

comedienne in the world, and I will not go so far as to say that the sight of her on the stage has made me change my opinion completely. I can say, however, that she is a willing and strenuous worker, that she is about three hundred times better on the stage than she was on the screen and that she certainly adds to the zest of "Hold On to Your Hats." Bert Gordon, of radio and vaudeville, is genuinely funny as a Hebraic Indian after the first few minutes, while Miss Eunice Healey, as the ingenue; the inevitable Jack Whiting as the inevitable juvenile; Arnold Moss—who was so good last season in "The Fifth Column"—as the villain, and Russ Brown as the straight man are of help, while a comic dance by one Gil Lamb has its points. A very beautiful showgirl with the enigmatic name of Jinx Falkenburg adds greatly to the decorative qualities of the show.

The Harburg-Lane score is lively and tuneful in a reasonably modest way. There is a good romantic song in "The World Is in My Arms," a couple of good Jolson songs in "Walkin' Along Mindin' My Business" and "There's a Great Day Coming, Ma-nana" and a good comic song in "Down on the Dude Ranch"—which, incidentally, Mr. Jolson, Miss Raye and Mr. Gordon put over admirably. The dances are pleasant and Raoul Pene Du Bois's sets and costumes are correctly colorful. To get back to the book, it is what I suppose I would call, if I knew exactly what the slang term meant, "corny," but fortunately, it doesn't get in the way and it does supply the framework for some amusing comedy of a happily reminiscent vaudeville quality. All of this, however, is merely in passing. What we all want to know is that Mr. Jolson is back on Broadway again in characteristic form, which, in these dire times, is very good news, indeed.

"Hold On to Your Hats"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 12, 1940

Hold On to Your Hats Has Old-Time Jolson Flavor

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

AL JOLSON returned to Broadway last night in his first stage production in 10 long years and received one of the warmest, most boisterous welcomes of his career. The inspiration of facing a live New York audience was so pronounced, in fact, that the grand old troubadour sat up half the night entertaining the audience with his old-time melodies, giving them good measure for the \$8.80 they had spent for opening-night seats at the Shubert Theater.

The tribute, I am constrained to say, was rather to Mr. Jolson than to the show, which is called *Hold On to Your Hats* and which has something or other to do with the experiences of a radio cowboy who, by error, finds himself in real bandit territory. But under the circumstances of Mr. Jolson's return from his long stretch in Hollywood perhaps the book doesn't matter. The important thing is that Mr. Jolson is home again.

It is an old-fashioned musical comedy, embellished with some of Raoul Pene DuBois' most lavish mountings and costumes and by a set of chorus girls who seem to have stepped directly out of some agency for models. It boasts some excellent ensemble dances that were staged by George Hale in a rapid, modern tempo and music ranging from mediocre to excellent. It is short only on comedy, unless you happen to be one to whom Miss Martha Raye's vigorous brand of clowning appeals.

Miss Raye, as you probably know, is not the subtle type.

Mr. Jolson's entrance, as the timid lone rider of the radio, is marked by a monologue of the rare old variety that has long since, unhappily, departed from vaudeville. It is conversational, colloquial and topical, and the audience loves it. This is followed by a radio sketch that has been considerably smartened up and given more briskness than when I saw it two weeks ago in Philadelphia. The sketch serves to establish the character of the lone rider, who faints whenever a gun goes off.

Succeeding scenes carry the lone rider to

the Far West, where, by dint of fortuitous mistakes, he succeeds in overpowering the Red Terror of the Plains, a Mexican bandit, and all is well. By this time it is past 11:30, and Mr. Jolson begins singing the old favorites—April Showers, Sonny Boy, Swanee and the rest. As he observes, the Stork Club will probably still be open when the show breaks, so why not sit around a while.

A team of three is responsible for the book, which is credited to the joint efforts of Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis and which must have been written by Hollywood conference methods. E. Y. Harburg did the lyrics, which are nothing startling, and Burton Lane wrote the music.

There is considerable flavor of the old-time Jolson in his first song, *Walkin' Along Mindin' My Business*, and it has the definite swing and lilting melody that was so characteristic of the songs that made him famous. The best ballad, to my mind, is *The World Is in My Arms*, which was gracefully sung by Jack Whiting and Eunice Healey. The song with the greatest dance potential is *There's a Great Day Coming*, *Manana*, which serves as the first-act finale.

The most spectacular scene is at the beginning of the second act, in which Mr. DuBois, dressed loose in a Mexican setting, produces some gorgeous color effects, first with lavish use of red and white and, later, of the black and white in which he works so effectively.

Hollywood seems not to have changed Al Jolson. Certainly he has not become slothful or lazy. His feet travel as rapidly and as lightly as ever. He still throws his entire frame into every song he sings, shaking the words out of him in paroxysms of energy as in the old days, and he still projects his personality to the top row of the galleries.

Those who assist most effectively in keeping the show lively are, in addition to Mr. Whiting and Miss Healey (who has, by the way, one show-stopping dance), are Bert Gordon, the mad Russian; Arnold Moss as the bandit, Russ Brown as a radio manager, Gil Lamb, eccentric dancer.

It is good to have Al Jolson back. Broadway is beginning to look like Broadway again.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 12, 1940

'Hold On to Your Hats' Brings Al Jolson Back to Broadway After an Absence of Nine Years

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IT'S all right folks. "Hold On to Your Hats" has arrived at the Shubert, where it opened last evening, and the musical comedy season has begun with enormous gusto. For this is the show that is bringing Al Jolson back to Broadway after an absence of nine years. If you think you have lost some of the old fondness for him during the interim, prepare for a pleasant surprise. He is a little older now; his hair is a little thinner. But none of the warmth has gone out of his singing, and none of the gleam has departed from his story-telling. By great good fortune he is also appearing in one of the funniest musical plays that have stumbled on to Broadway for years. Hold your sides as tightly as the title directs you to hold your hat.

Guy Bolton, Matt Brooks and Eddie Davis (for authors are now coming in triplicate) have come out of the library, with a mad book about a radio cowboy who finds himself involved in some desperate doings on a dude-ranch in the West. Burton Lane has written a frenzied score for it; E. Y. Harburg has put together some comic lyrics. Shooting the works in honor of reunion,

Mr. Jolson and his associates have populated it with about the best all-around cast of the last five-year period. Martha Raye is a barrel of fun. Bert Gordon is hilarious as an Indian with an East Side accent. Any number of excellent dancers whirl through it. The chorus is extraordinarily attractive. Squandering all the paint in sight, Raoul Pene DuBois has designed a light-footed, beautiful production. And Edgar MacGregor, standing in the director's box, has pulled all the details together and turned out a

boisterous, fast musical show without a dull spot in it.

As a matter of fact, the combination of Al Jolson and Martha Raye is just about perfect. He is the magnetic minstrel who has a way with a song and the power to capture an audience instantly. She is a fantastic cut-up with a great capacity for personal enjoyment. Two things stopped the show last evening. One was a slip of the tongue. In the frenzy of the moment Miss Raye found herself complimenting Al for "saving the Jews" instead of "the jewels," which was the word the book called for, and the confusion that resulted turned into comic hysteria. The other was "Down on the Dude Ranch" as sung by Al, Miss Raye and Bert Gordon. A burlesque ballad with some wonderful satiric lines, it is sung with great relish by an inspired trio of comedians, and might have gone on for a half hour if the verses had held out.

There are plenty of rousing songs for singing and dancing. "Don't Let It Get You Down" takes care of the sentiment. "There's a Great Day Coming, Manana" works revvily up to the dancing point. After the critics had departed, Mr. Jolson took some of his old songs out of his memory book. If there were any justice in a newspaper column, something handsome ought to be said for Eunice Healey, who is lovely; for George Church, who dances beautifully in the Mexican style; for Gil Lamb, who is a working hooper, and all the rest. For this is a capital musical show that has restored Al Jolson to his former glory and recovered some of the old abandon of fun and skylarking in the theatre.

"Louisiana Purchase"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 29, 1940

"Louisiana Purchase" Full of Quality, Talent and Irving Berlin

"Louisiana Purchase," musical comedy with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin and book by Morris Ryskind. Produced by B. G. De Sylva at the Imperial Theatre, New York, May 24, 1940.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I HAVE a feeling that the late Hughie Long himself would have liked "Louisiana Purchase," though what it does to the politics of the Hughie Long persuasion and practices is enough to rub them out in any other country except this tolerant and casual democracy.

Hughie believed in sharing the fun as well as the wealth, and there is a good bit of fun to share in "Louisiana Purchase." More, I think, than in any of the other musical revues that have recently come this way.

In addition to the fun, which can be credited to that trustworthy pair, William Gaxton and Victor Moore, aided by Morris Ryskind, who wrote their lines, and abetted by Vera Zorina, who furnishes her own, and Irene Bordoni, with bangs, who comes home joyfully to accept the best chance she has had in a long time.

In addition to the fun there is a score that only Irving Berlin could have written, and a half dozen topical lyrics that only Berlin would have thought of.

Generous Additions

It adds up, thanks to the producer's generosity, he being the B. G. De Sylva, who selected "DuBarry Was a Lady" for last Fall's Broadway number, and who has a way with

him and an eye of his own for these opulent entertainments—it adds up to considerable more show than you are customarily offered, even at high tariffs.

Mr. Gaxton represents the Louisiana interests of the late Hughie. Of course it is all fiction, being based on no more than Mr. Berlin and Mr. Ryskind have read in the papers, including much which Mr. Westbrook Pegler has written.

Mr. Moore is a United States Senator, Oliver P. Loganberry, from New Hampshire, who is sent into the deep South to investigate a certain Louisiana Purchase Corporation, Inc. There is something of the New England hick

about Senator Loganberry, but more of the shrewd Yankee who is a match for any musical comedy crook ever invented.

Mr. Gaxton and his quartet of double dealers seek to frame Senator Loganberry. Seek to interest him in sex in much the same old bedroom farce fashion that has been used on stage senators from the first reckonings of political satire.

Victor Scores

Mr. Moore is highly amusing as the timid and gullible but shrewd Loganberry. He gets hooked by Zorina, but escapes as her fiancé, he gets hooked again by Bordoni, but defeats her schemes by calling in a justice of the peace and marrying her.

Mr. Gaxton is again full of bounce, clear diction, slick hair and general likableness. Zorina is lovely of face and figure and gorgeously graceful in the dance, being especially attractive in a fantasy number in which she dreams of trading a young man's love for an old man's name. Her premier danseur is Charles Laake, and very helpful.

The Bordoni has a couple of good songs, including "Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day." So has Carol Bruce, including "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul."

There is the Berlin ballad strain in "You're Lonely and I'm Lonely," which Mr. Moore and Miss Zorina gave value, in spite of a slight gargling effect in their singing.

It is rating musical revues that gets a fellow down in this business. Most of them, being generously staged, well scored and of average merit in story, are of three-star value as entertainment.

But occasionally one comes along that tops the others in these divisions. Then what are you going to do. Give it three-plus obviously.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 29, 1940

Berlin's Louisiana Purchase Is Superb Musical Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE bright, new, musical comedy that B. G. De Sylva brought into the Imperial Theater last night is called Louisiana Purchase, and, as its name would imply, it is a satirical treatment of certain scandalous history in one of our great Southern commonwealths. As satire it is moderately effective, but as musical comedy it is superb and I think it will become a summer smash.

The good old team of Victor Moore and William Gaxton are romping on the stage again—the human titmouse and the elegant man-of-the-world, Casper Milquetoast and Mr. Big, the Timid Soul and the Mad of Action. With them is Irene Bordoni, sparkling and gay and happy and handsome. And, of course, there is Vera Zorina whom some people consider beautiful.

You will have to hunt through the lower brackets of the cast, however, to find the name of the newcomer who, to me at least, is the important discovery of the late season. There generally is one in every new show, and in this one she is Carol Bruce, who has graduated from movie shorts, road companies and traveling orchestras, into full grown musical comedies. Miss Bruce has radiant youth, a personality that reaches out over the footlights, and a voice and manner of delivery that drive every song home with a flourish. Spotlight for Miss Bruce, please, Mr. De Sylva!

Morris Ryskind, who wrote the book for Louisiana Purchase, has altered the charac-

ter of the eternal fall guy, Mr. Moore, though not enough to diminish the comic value of that seeming helplessness which is Mr. Moore's trademark. In the role of a New Hampshire Senator who has gone to New Orleans to investigate a corrupt administration, there is enough Yankee shrewdness to offset the customary bewilderment and mental confusion of which Mr. Moore has always been the victim in previous comedies. And in this one he is well on his way to the White House—if he can only cross a picket line—at the final curtain.

Despite the possession of a sort of rustic common sense and the accumulated wisdom of 30 years in politics, Mr. Moore is nevertheless not permitted to abandon the quality of

innocence and guilelessness that make his characterization invariably charming. His pathetic homesickness is there and his disarming naivete in the presence of bold women, always a delight to an audience. In all this, Mr. Moore gave us his usual magnificent performance. Mr. Gaxton was admirable, as usual.

The musical play is lavishly mounted, beautifully costumed, and abounds in dancing talent, and this brings us to consideration of Irving Berlin's important share in the proceedings.

There is a swing and tunefulness to Mr. Berlin's music that belong to nobody else in the song writing business, and he has given us some of the most entrancing tunes of recent years in Louisiana Purchase. The theme song, titled from the play, and as sung by Miss Bruce, should have a sweeping success, and The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul, a spiritual in swing, is colorful and thrilling. Latinus Know How in the manner of a rumba should also be popular everywhere. Miss Bordoni is given a charming melody in Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day.

The dancing is exceptionally good. In many numbers ballet, directed by the expert George Balanchine, is merged with modern forms arranged by Carl Randall, and the effect is striking. A chorus of especially pretty young women and a group of ballerinas who have more pulchritude and fewer knobby legs than most toe dancers complete the picture.

Another pleasant addition to the show is that of the Martins, a quartet of swing singers who provide good musical background for Miss Bruce's songs.

Louisiana Purchase is somewhat right wing in its politics, but that doesn't bother people like those who paid \$8.50 a seat to see it last night. It does not, however, make its gentle jibing at the administration particularly bitter, and as far as holding up Louisiana corruption to ridicule, it doesn't let reform get in the way of its comedy. I rather liked the idea, though, of the college dean down there who had to sign his papers with an X.

Louisiana Purchase is roaring fun.

"Louisiana Purchase"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 29, 1940

'Louisiana Purchase,' Berlin Musical Opens at the Imperial Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

YOU will not need to grace yourself against the pungent tonic of political satire when you visit "Louisiana Purchase," which opened at the Imperial last evening. Politics are freely mentioned and wheezes now and then have social significance, but the mood is one of luxurious relaxation. Lovers sing to the lilting music of Irving Berlin; Victor Moore's gentle, wistful drollery is an innocent delight, and Vera Zorina dips and sways in melodious dance. All is carefree at the Imperial, and the world is gayly colored.

Morrie Ryskind, who wrote the book, may at one time have had sharper ideas. His nimble plot is laid in a "mythical state" which, the chorus agrees in an opening number shall be called Louisiana. (If there really is, by some odd coincidence, a State called Louisiana neither the chorus nor the authors are to be held responsible.) In that improbable commonwealth there is political corruption. Stolen lumber is sold three times over to the university and all the important officials may be reached by calling a given number and asking for Mabel. But the boss, as it turns out, still can fall in love.

Senator Oliver P. Loganberry, a Republican with presidential leanings and investigatorial habits, intrudes on this paradise. Mr. Moore is Senator Loganberry, shrewder than usual, but in as many scrapes as always—plump and wide-eyed in a bustling world as always, and as always incredibly funny. Zorina is used by the boss, a Mr. Gaxton, to entice Senator Loganberry and everybody wins in the end. Mr. Ryskind is lightheartedly malicious about the New Deal at intervals and all is neat and expert. But none of this is nearly as important as the music of Mr. Berlin, or the presence of Mr. Moore and Miss Zorina or the demonstration by Mr. Gaxton of the way of a lady with a girdle. None of it is as important as the return of Irene Bordoni, if you come to that, or the charming singing of Carol Bruce. "Louisiana Purchase" is never as witty as it is smoothly graceful in staging and performance.

Mr. Berlin, coming back after eight years in West Coast retirement, brings a score with him. Probably it is not his best; certainly it is fresh and gay and lilting. You will be hearing most of the songs—the title song, for example, and "Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day" and

'LOUISIANA PURCHASE'

A musical comedy in two acts; music and lyrics by Irving Berlin; book by Morrie Ryskind, based on a story by B. G. De Sylva; book staged by Edgar MacGregor; ballets by George Balanchine; costumes and scenery by Tom Lee; presented at the Imperial Theater on May 28, 1940, by Mr. De Sylva. The cast:

Secretary	.....	Georgia Carroll
Sam Liebowitz	.....	John Eliot
Col. Davis D. Davis, Sr.	.....	Robert Pitkin
Abner	.....	Nicodemus
Davis D. Davis, Jr.	.....	Ray Mayer
Dean Manning	.....	Ralph Higgs
Police Capt. Whitfield	.....	E. H. Robins
Jim Taylor	.....	William Gaxton
Beatrice	.....	Carol Bruce
Lee Davis	.....	Nick Mr. Moore
Emmy-Lou	.....	April Ames
Marina Van Linden	.....	Vera Zorina
Madame Bordelaise	.....	Irene Bordoni
Senator Oliver P. Loganberry	.....	Victor Moore
Alphonse	.....	Charles La Torre

"The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," which is very nearly the best of them all. Mr. Berlin has provided grand music for all the sprites to dance to, and for the lovely Zorina to float upon, and Mr. Ryskind's book includes moments of carnival and an interlude of fantasy as well as plenty of occupation for Mr. Moore and Mr. Gaxton. Mr. Berlin's lyrics are saucy and, generally, amusing. Tom Lee has colored sets and costumes lavishly and George Balanchine has guided the dancers through arresting intricacies.

And, as is always the case in superior entertainments, no listing of credits quite does justice to the whole. Set "Louisiana Purchase" down as luxurious entertainment, which gets better as it goes along and ends in a fine swirl—a handsome and likable show, full of melody and Mr. Moore and gently salted with political pleasantries. It is obviously to be seen.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 29, 1940

The Senator

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE interesting political career of Mr. Victor Moore once again adds joy to the musical comedy season, this time when we are in particular need of all available joys. It would be insulting your theatrical education to ask if you remember Mr. Moore as the Vice-President of the United States in "Of Thee I Sing" and as the American Ambassador to Russia in "Leave It to Me!" Well, now the eminent statesman is to be found as a lonely Republican Senator from New Hampshire investigating corruption in the sovereign state of Louisiana and having a tough time of it fighting off the attempts to frame him. Always a delightful comedian, Mr. Moore seems even more expert than ever in this "Louisiana Purchase," and, aided by an attractive Irving Berlin score, a generally lively Morrie Ryskind book, a colorful production and such expert performers as Miss Vera Zorina and William Gaxton, he manages to provide us with a properly entertaining musical comedy.

It seems curious to say at this late date that Mr. Moore is even improving as a comedian, but I venture to state that I think he is. It isn't that he is funnier than usual or that he manages his suggestion of helpless pathos any more engagingly. It is merely that he seems to me to have grown increasingly legitimate as an actor; to have succeeded in giving not only an amusing and enormously likable performance but a genuine, completely rounded

and quite brilliant characterization of a bewildered little man fighting back with high courage at his unscrupulous foes. In the book of "Louisiana Purchase," Mr. Ryskind has wisely given his hero several opportunities to prove himself smarter than his enemies, a thing never heard of in the previous roles written for Mr. Moore, and the comedian handles them with unusual skill. You must see him confounding the wily Mr. Gaxton to find that musical comedy's most oppressed and timid soul can also manage upon occasion to be a pretty shrewd fellow and yet never lose the flavor of his fine characterization.

The only trouble I found with Mr. Ryskind's book is that its political satire is not always especially striking and that it is rather given

to playing on that one theme of the attempted framing of the Senator by a series of women too insistently. On the other hand, though, it frequently is vastly funny in its unashamedly hard-boiled fashion and it is always serviceable as a vehicle for its admirable stars. As for Mr. Berlin's score, it struck me as being gay, amusing, tuneful and charming, managing in such numbers as "Louisiana Purchase," "Outside of That I Love You," "What Chance Have I?" and "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," among others, to be equally effective in both the music and the lyrics. The production, too, is of that lavish sort that Mr. De Sylva is accustomed to provide for his shows, and it is always pleasant to look upon. Of course, all musical comedies must have their ballets, and, since this is the case, it is a comfort to find Miss Zorina in them.

It is, of course, not only as a ballerina that Miss Zorina is of such help to "Louisiana Purchase." Once more she proves herself one of the loveliest of musical comedy performers, playing with grace, charm, humor and that sort of personal radiance that is so much more important than any of the other qualities, the role of the first and most sentimental of the series of ladies bent on framing Senator Loganberry. Mr. Gaxton is again what a football writer might be tempted to call a tower of strength in the backfield, adding that in exhaustive zest and energy of his to the part of a sympathetic member of the Louisiana corruptionist ring, who is both hero and villain of the new show. If only for his sense of excitement Mr. Gaxton would be of aid to a musical show. Miss Irene Bordoni is likewise present in her customarily amiable fashion, and a young singer named Carol Bruce, who can put over a song with much effectiveness in a rather too assured way, was one of the successes of the evening. "Louisiana Purchase" seems destined for success if outside events are not too much for it.

"Louisiana Purchase"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 29, 1940

'Louisiana Purchase' Is a Musical Comedy by Irving Berlin and Morrie Ryskind

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BEING good fellows at heart, Irving Berlin and Morrie Ryskind have provided all the actors with good parts in "Louisiana Purchase," which was put on at the Imperial last evening. Since the cast includes Victor Moore, Vera Zorina, William Gaxton and Irene Bordoni, kind treatment yields pleasant dividends. For Mr. Moore, who has been acting Throttlebottom long enough, is now promoted to the office of United States Senator, with the privilege of giving as many slaps as Mr. Gaxton aims at him; and the Zorina and the Bordoni are in fine fettle. Mr. Berlin and Mr. Ryskind have been associated with more brilliant shows than this. But after an absence of seven years, Mr. Berlin has returned to remind us that he still can write songs without bursting into a fever of perspiration; and after being in Hollywood for about five years Mr. Ryskind still can make a book lie down and behave itself. "Louisiana Purchase" is a gay, simple, friendly musical comedy with the accomplished ease of a thoroughbred.

Although the topic is politics in Louisiana, except nothing very devastating by way of satire. Mr. Ryskind is not in the lethal mood of "Of Thee I Sing" when he was collaborat-

ing with George S. Kaufman. He is telling the humorous story of an aged U. S. Senator who comes to Louisiana to investigate the speculations of a gang of politicians. To quash the investigation the Louisiana boss frames the senator once by photographing him with a glamour girl in his lap and again by planting an experienced lady in his hotel bedroom at night. But since no well-bred musical comedy can betray any of its leading performers, "Louisiana Purchase" ends with a political draw. The polite conventions of the genre keep

Mr. Ryskind from polishing off the subject with the gusto and savage delight it deserves.

Mr. Berlin has any number of idiomatic tunes in the same style of humor and sentiment. "Louisiana Purchase" is the title of his most beguiling song, which Carol Bruce sings with infectious enjoyment. "Sex Marches On" is the most comic song. Mr. Gaxton takes charge of the singing. Miss Bordoni, singing in defense of Latin love-making, notably succeeds in making "Manhattan" and "Flatten" a perfect rhyme for "Latin." There is an amusingly plaintive ditty for Mr. Moore. There is an excellent spiritual entitled "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," which is the prelude to an exuberant dance. Some day an enterprising songwriter is going to dispense with the tinny sound of close agony singing and the cheap pronunciations that invariably go with it. Mr. Berlin has not yet got that far away from conventional music-making.

As a United States Senator with presidential aspirations, Mr. Moore has acquired political authority without losing the tottering sweetness of his comedy style. He is an absurdly comic figure when he patters around the stage in an old-fashioned nightgown. As usual, Mr. Gaxton drives into all the corners of the show and gives it a good shaking-up. Not for years has the Gallic Bordoni made such a crisp use of good material. Zorina is not only dancing with long leaps and rhythmic joy; she has also become an excellent actress.

The show has been agreeably set and costumed by Tom Lee. George Balanchine has arranged the usual ballets, getting pretty close once to what used to be known as "aesthetic dancing." Carl Randall has put the chorus through its paces. By being kind to all the actors, Mr. Berlin and Mr. Ryskind have ducked the satiric implications of their topic. But they have succeeded in putting together a good-humored and enjoyable show.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 29, 1940

Gaxton, Moore and Zorina in "Louisiana Purchase"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

UPON rhymed advice of counsel, the chorus girls and boys at the Imperial insist the Louisiana in which Mr. De Sylva's new musical is laid is an imaginary state—a sort of Ruretania of corruption—and that the crooked politicians who figure in its government are fictitious. Be that as it may, one surely does not have to worry about libel (or even the fate of the Kingfisher's machine) when reporting that "Louisiana Purchase" is a very agreeable show.

Fiction or no fiction, the facts—the theatrical facts—must in this case be out. And extremely pleasant facts they are. Mr. Berlin has turned to Broadway with a score that is tuneful throughout and particularly catchy in such numbers as "Sex Marches On" and "Louisiana Purchase." Some of his less sentimental lyrics, especially his introductory ones, are adroit in their rhyming. Then the dance numbers. Carl Randall has directed are vigorous and gay, and George Balanchine's ballets boast their imaginative charm. Tom Lee's settings are at once opulent, tasteful, and ingenious. And the book—Mr. De Sylva's book—though somewhat reactionary in its gibes, is a serviceable affair. It includes its uproarious interludes and holds the interest throughout as it tells how a United States Senator, investigating corruption in Louisiana, is outwitted by the local politicians after causing them many uneasy moments.

The Moore the Merrier

What really matters most at the Imperial is that it is Victor Moore who plays the investigating senator. He is a good little man, this legislator who is described as a male Carrie Nation. He does not drink or smoke and is a bachelor pure and simple. At any rate he did not drink or smoke and was a bachelor until he got to Louisiana. How his habits change is one of the evening's major dividends in pleasure.

Not since Mr. Moore immortalized Mr. Throttlebottom has he had a better part acted more creatively. His Senator Logan-

berry has many of the welcome Victor Moore characteristics. The timidity, the cherubic innocence, the befuddled voice—they are all there. Mr. Moore, however, is an actor who grows. In a changing world, he also changes. Not too much, for that would be a national catastrophe. Enough nonetheless to characterize admirably the shrewd politician beneath the feebly innocent.

Mr. Gaxton as always makes a sturdy contribution by his energy and driving professionalism. His description (with gestures) of a lady's slipping into a girle is a masterpiece of comic pantomime.

As for Zorina she is fascinating as the girl who at first tries to frame the little senator. She continues to be the poetry of motion. What she brings to our stage is not only rare grace and charm but the loveliest body seen behind local footlights in many years. If she starts slowly, she rises to genuine heights in her ballet numbers, especially in her dream scene.

Carol Bruce is a useful newcomer, possessed of much authority, a radiant personality, and a warm voice. And Irene Bordoni, one of this department's favorites, is on hand to chant the Latin's prowess as a lover and to lend her radiance, her accent, and her manner, to proceedings that are extremely likable.

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Pasadena Playhouse

"Separate Rooms"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 25, 1940

"Separate Rooms" New Farce at Maxine Elliott's

By WILELLA WALDORF

ALAN DINEHART, Glenda Farrell, Lyle Talbot and several of their associates on the screen returned to the Broadway stage last Saturday evening in a farce entitled "Separate Rooms," revealed at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. During its recent tryout tour, the play was called "Thanks for My Wife" and a program note states that "Separate Rooms" is controlled by Thanks for My Wife, Inc., of Hollywood, California.

It took four authors, including Mr. Dinehart, to whip "Separate Rooms" into shape, and last Saturday's opening performance gave the impression that strenuous efforts have been made to modernize something of the vintage of "Up in Mabel's Room" and "Getting Gertie's Garter" era. Mr. Dinehart, looking a little older, but still navigating the stage with good-natured assurance and even a certain jauntiness, has cast himself as New York's most widely syndicated columnist who is also a woman-hater. When his younger and more naive brother writes a play that unaccountably turns out to be a hit and proceeds to marry his star, the irate keyhole-peeper is restrained from revealing the lady's past in 300 newspapers only by the plea of his secretary (or Girl Friday) for a three-month armistice.

Discovering at the end of this period that his sister-in-law has all but ruined his brother financially, and insists, besides, upon being a wife in name only—a \$400 pedigreed Chihuahua is the only male permitted to enter her bedroom—the columnist decides not to print his accumulated evidence of a riotous past, but to blackmail the actress into becoming not only a Wife, but a Housewife. There is even talk of a Baby.

Anybody who can't go on from here and predict the third act has obviously never experienced a farce of the choice "Separate

Rooms" vintage. Saturday night's audience was often in convulsions at the quips Mr. Dinehart and his three associate authors have devised. There were shrill squeals from the balcony, gruff guffaws from the orchestra section, and Tommy Manville sat in the front row. What more could wanderers from Hollywood ask?

Lyle Talbot wore spectacles and looked worried as the simple-minded playwright, and Glenda Farrell lent her blonde competence to the part of the actress with the past. Since a remarkable number of Miss Farrell's lines ended in "See?" she sounded a good deal like Diamond Lil much of the time. Jack Smart as a fat and bumptious butler exhausted this reviewer completely (and not from laughter). Mosele Britton (Mrs. Dinehart) had the thankless task of playing the columnist's Girl Friday, and Austin Fairman was back at his old trade as a wealthy man-about-town with an Oxford brogue. Madora Keene dropped in for a few moments along toward the end as a crackpot female out interviewing for the magazine, Household Hints, and the whole thing went on in an elegant penthouse setting, complete

"SEPARATE ROOMS"

"SEPARATE ROOMS," a farce by Joseph Carole and Alan Dinehart, in collaboration with Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph. Presented by Bobby Crawford last Saturday evening at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. Staged by William B. Friedlander.

THE CAST

Taggart	Jack Smart
Gary Bryce	Austin Fairman
Don Stackhouse	Lyle Talbot
Linda	Mosele Britton
Scop Davis	James Robbins
Pam	Glenda Farrell
Jim Stackhouse	Alan Dinehart
Leona Sharpe	Madora Keene

with bar, that seemed familiar, but was credited to no specific designer in the program.

Mr. Dinehart and his confreres are not attempting to deceive anybody. "Separate Rooms" is just about what you'd expect from its name. If the title sounds alluring and the prospect of seeing a flock of Hollywood celebrities in the flesh, exciting, this is your dish.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK SUN, March 25, 1940

'Separate Rooms'

Alan Dinehart Returns in a New Farce

ALAN DINEHART, Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot, who have spent the last few weeks barnstorming their way east from Hollywood, have turned up at last in the Broadway sector. On the road and during their seven-week stay in Chicago, the vehicle in which they arrived here was known as "Thanks for My Wife," but it was rechristened "Separate Rooms" for its Saturday night premiere at Maxine Elliott's theater. We fear it needs far more, however, than just a new title to succeed, for this farce, which Mr. Dinehart and Joseph Carole have concocted with the help of Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph, is at best a routine little play on the rowdy side, and its numerous authors have stuffed it nearly to the choking point with theatrical naps. Not all of them are fresh and quite a share of them are decidedly not for the squeamish. "Separate Rooms" not being just the right play to which to take maiden Aunt Bessie from Ringhamton.

It discloses how Jim Stackhouse, the great New York columnist, gossip peddler and character assassin, blackmails a selfish and generally obnoxious young actress who has married his playwrighting younger brother, Don, into helping the young man attain the domesticity and fatherhood he so earnestly desires. The latter point, of course, paves the way for plenty of jests of a highly obnoxious nature. For a while during the latter part of the second act when big brother Jim takes over direction of the activities of the household, the play does reach a hilarious pitch, but by the final act, it has subsided again into a mere string of gags.

Mr. Dinehart, being both a personable player and one who knows his way around a stage, be the play good or bad, manages to make much of the play sound better than it really is in his portrayal of the columnist. The rest of the acting is only about as good as the play deserves. Certainly Miss Farrell added nothing to her stature as a player by the bolterous interpretation she gave of the actress Saturday night and Mr. Talbot, shouldered with the onerous task of playing the naive dramatist, succeeding not only in making the character a thorough going sap, but for the most part a dull one to boot.

The most disturbing thing about the whole proceeding is that we doubt if Mr. Dinehart, who has been away in Hollywood now for six years, will be staying around very long in this one. We shall miss Mr. Dinehart when he departs: not so "Separate Rooms."

HERRICK BROWN.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 25, 1940

One Farce Comedy Idea Floors Four Authors

"Separate Rooms," farce by Joseph Carole, Alan Dinehart, Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph, presented by Bobby Crawford at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, March 23, 1940.



By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT took four authors to think of a farce called "Separate Rooms" which opened Saturday night at Maxine Elliott's, and the most they managed to think of was a farce called "Separate Rooms."

One fancies that, working backward from the title and knowing they were doing a farce, Messrs. Carole, Dinehart, Gottlieb and Joseph must have decided that the separate rooms would have to be bedrooms or there wouldn't be any farce. And the people involved would have to be husband and wife or there wouldn't be any comedy sense in having separate bedrooms.

The plot? A hard-boiled actress marries the soft-boiled author of the hit she is in because she can play him for a chump, use all his money and have a good time on the side. But the soft-boiled author happens to have a hard-boiled brother who is a gossip columnist, and this gossip columnist has so much dirt on the actress that he can force her, on pain of exposure in print, to be a kind and loving wife.

Wife gives in and to nobody's surprise but her own she finds she enjoys being domestic. Get the columnist fixed up with his adoring secretary in the last act and you have the complete scenario.

There are fairly frequent funny lines, but most of them sound as though one of the collaborators had said, "This is a good gag."

Let's put it in here. The flow and the pace necessary to a light sex comedy are lacking. Lacking, too, is a rudimentary knowledge of the columning business. "How much time before deadline?" asks the paragrapher of his secretary—as if a man who didn't know what time his stuff was due would last long enough to draw a week's pay.

Glenda Farrell is blonde and brittle as the lass who has wifehood forced upon her. Alan Dinehart barks and shrugs and drives along at a good farcical pace as the columnist. Lyle Talbot plays a gentle male animal as the needful brother and Jack Smart takes it easy as a fat and sassy servant. But none of the characters is real enough to laugh about much. A modernistic living room set has a bar for frequent drinks.

"Separate Rooms"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 25, 1940

Separate Rooms Gets Cast Mostly from Hollywood

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE is a decided odor of Hollywood in and around the Maxine Elliott Theater, where Bobby Crawford presented, Saturday night, a comedy called *Separate Rooms* and featuring Alan Dinehart, Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot.

In the first place, the playwright department has a roster of four names, the dramatic quadruplets responsible for the work being Mr. Dinehart himself, Joseph Carole, Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph. In the second place, the setting—a New York penthouse—is the best thing in the show, yet the designer gets no credit at all in the program. In the third place, the cast is drawn almost entirely from the films, from Mr. Dinehart and Miss Farrell, "who has appeared in nearly 40 pictures in the past five years," to Mr. Talbot, "who has appeared in 30 pictures," and James Robins, who has fitted from Warners' to Universal to Columbia.

Also in the cast is Jack Smart, who has been on the screen for many years, and who

boasts the dubious distinction of being a radio comedian as well.

Given the cast history of this troupe, then, it is not difficult to imagine the result. *Separate Rooms* seems to be a mildly amusing

B picture which somehow or other has strayed into legitimate circles. Why the escape from Hollywood, I don't know, unless it is that Mr. Hayes might have frowned at one or two of the situations, and certainly would not have approved of one or two of the lines.

Yet the play, it must be admitted in all honesty, does have some cleverly invented situations and a number of lines that bring laughter to an audience. Its fault is that while the story might be told plausibly in the movies, bulwarked by the realism of that medium, it is wholly unbelievable when it is recited, in one setting on the stage.

The quadruplet authors establish as their heroine a flighty, egotistic, selfish, gold-digging and fatuous actress, who is married to a strangely blind and mild-mannered young playwright. The playwright's brother, a columnist patterned (you guessed it) after Walter Winchell, threatens to expose the bride's lurid past unless she mends her ways, stops gadding about with playboys, stops spending money for diamonds and Mexican flea-hounds and accords her husband the customary rights of a consort.

The actress, considerably in a stew lest her career be ruined, becomes unwillingly domesticated and in the process actually falls in love with her husband. And, while wishing the young couple well, I, for one, cannot see what either one of them saw in the other in the first place.

Separate Rooms will offer no competition to the other plays on Broadway. And it won't hurt the World's Fair.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES
March 25, 1940

Through the Keyhole

OUT in Chicago, where they gave it a shakedown run, it was called "Thanks for My Wife." This being Broadway, where allusions must learn to stand on their own feet, they have pointed it up to "Separate Rooms," and as such Maxine Elliott's received it on Easter's Eve. With a cast composed mainly of folk from the Hollywood lots, it continues as a tale of the columnist, his secretary, his brother, the actress the latter marries, the butler and the dog. Oh, yes; the set is a penthouse living room, and on the left is a door leading into one bedroom, on the right is a door leading into another bedroom. A bar is near the center. Columnists drink.

Alan Dinehart, in there battling as both co-author and actor, is the proprietor of the keyhole stand, sour but with a heart of gold, in love but not knowing he is in love—until the last, when the author whispers to the actor that the curtain had better come down. Lyle Talbot is the brother, playing the role of a mild playwright-husband much as Mr. Nugent pursued the Nugent-Thurber muse in "The Male Animal." For looks they give you Glenda Farrell, which is all right. And for dialogue—well, the Easter season is upon the world, even to Thirty-ninth Street, and you happen to like the joke the boys are telling you will get a nice dirty laugh, and in any case at all you probably would like most of the second act. They did Saturday, anyway.

The tale, in the fashioning of which Mr. Dinehart was aided and abetted by Joseph Carole, opens with the creation of a new star in a work by a new playwright, the pair of them thereupon deciding to get married. The brother who writes for the mass circulation papers, thinks this is bad, very bad, but the Girl Friday persuades him to lay off a time and give marriage a chance. So what? The marriage turns out O. K. and the master, himself, is lured at the end into a union with the G. F. The luring is through false charges of approaching paternity, but columnists have to expect that. So, as a matter of fact, does anyone who has seen the earlier reaches of "Separate Rooms."

L. N.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 25, 1940

'Separate Rooms'

Farce by Carole, Dinehart,
Gottlieb and Joseph

MESSRS. Dinehart, Carole, Gottlieb and Joseph, collaborators on the farce "Separate Rooms," are a bit slow in setting up the pins of their premise, but when they get around to knocking them over, the four-man writing (or Lowling) team comes pretty close to making a strike. In the first act they seriously and slowly start to tell the story of an ambitious actress who marries the author of her successful play in order to further her ambitions. After that, with the exception of one or two dull stretches, the playwrights proceed to push the plot around in the best George Abbott tradition.

A newspaper columnist hopes to marry off an actress to a rich man-about-town by arranging to have her star in a play written by his brother. The play, he believes, is so bad that she will have to give up her stage career for matrimony. When the work turns out to be a success, the actress marries the columnist's brother to insure her career in the theater. Disapproving of the marriage, the columnist at first attempts to break up the union, but finally sets about making his brother happy by threatening to expose the actress's past unless she settles down and becomes a good wife. He succeeds.

Thanks to the expert direction of William R. Friedlander and Alan Dinehart's make-believing as the columnist, the farce turns out to be a more amusing play than the synopsis of the plot would indicate.

Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot, refugees from Hollywood at the moment, lend themselves readily to the complexities of the plot. Jack Smart, as the butler, does more than his share to keep that tedious first act from falling flat. The balance of the cast does what is expected of them with reserve. Overlook the first act; the second and third are fun.

J. P.

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"Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 9, 1939

'Life With Father,' Based on Clarence Day's Stories, Opens at the Empire

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THEY have taken the inimitable stories Clarence Day wrote about his father and braided them into a play which is called, of course, "Life With Father" and opened last evening at the Empire. And they have captured all the life which bubbled in the stories, and all the richness of character of the man who became simply "Father" to thousands, and all the comedy which was so tender and at the same time so vigorous. You would never have dreamed any one could do so beautiful a job of translation.

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse turned the sketches into scenes and acts and Mr. Lindsay plays Father himself, that choleric household tyrant of the 1880's who was always laying down the law and being firm, and who was never quite a match for Mother. He is one of the abiding characters, I suspect, of American literature, and he has not lost an inch of bristle or a single intonation of comic rage in his translation to the stage. And if you have an image of Father you will find it safe in Mr. Lindsay's hands.

There is no describing Father in a paragraph or two for those so unfortunate as not to have met him. He is red-haired and highly colored and he explodes regularly, with despairing blasphemies which are more than half prayer. "Oh, God!" cries Father, beseeching guidance in a world filled with the gentle irrationality, and the loving guile, of Mother; filled, too, with relatives who come to visit, with bills, with Democrats, and with the awful determination of the New Haven Railroad to ruin him by having wrecks. It is filled with maids who hear Father and weep and vanish; with young sons who in-

sist on buying new suits, and with china pug dogs which appear suddenly on the dining table. He is heroic, in his rage, is Father, and hopelessly masculine in his inability to cope with his wife. She, so unpredictable as a bird and as tentatively determined as she needs to be, smiles and weeps and has her way.

Life With Father was a series of exploding episodes, and it is still a little that in the play. But Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have found a thread to run through it. Mother wants Father to be baptized and Father struggles, and is sure he won't be kept out of heaven on a "technicality." But Mother, who could not live anywhere without Father and comes tumbling down the stairs pell-mell when she thinks he needs her, is taking no chances. Father thunders and changes the subject and feels that there is unfairness somewhere, but baptized he is in the end. By then Clarence has got his new suit, and his girl, too, and if Mother has lost her pug dog—it is changed for the suit in a transaction which makes Father tear his hair—she has

'LIFE WITH FATHER'

A play in three acts by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; based on stories by Clarence Day; staged by Bretaigne Windust; setting and costumes by Stewart Chaney; presented at the Empire Theater on November 8, 1939, by Oscar Serlin. The cast:

Vinnie.....	Dorothy Stickney
Annie.....	Katherine Bard
Clarence.....	John Drew Devereaux
Whitney.....	Richard Simon
Harlan.....	Raymond Roe
Father.....	Larry Robinson
Margaret.....	Howard Lindsay
Cora.....	Dorothy Bernard
Mary.....	Ruth Hammond
The Rev. Dr. Lloyd.....	Teresa Wright
Norrie.....	Richard Sterling
Dr. Humphreys.....	Portia Morrow
Dr. Sommers.....	Nellie Burr
Dr. Humphreys.....	A. H. Van Buren
Dr. Sommers.....	John C. King
Maggie.....	Timothy Kearse

lost it, you can be sure, only for the moment. It is gay and funny and, I think by all odds the most engaging, happiest play in town. It is done in a set which is a museum piece of Americana, and the foibles of the past wander happily into it. And it is also, lightly and without laboring the point, part of the experience of any lucky wife and lucky husband.

* Mr. Lindsay's portrait has, under the circumstances, something faintly miraculous about it. Every one who reads Mr. Day's stories invented Father for himself, and any actor in the part risks being considered an interloper. But Mr. Lindsay's Father is, by what may be a happy coincidence but is more apt to be mighty fine acting, precisely the Father I had imagined and I suspect almost every one will find this true for himself. Mother was never so clear, so Miss Dorothy Stickney has a freer field, and her Vinnie is a delight. All the other parts are subsidiary to these, but John Drew Devereaux, Richard Simon, Raymond Roe and Larry Robinson are happy choices to play the red-headed Day boys and the other actors add genial life to an animated, completely captivating play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 9, 1939

Life With Father True to Essays

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

LIFE with Clarence Day's father, in all the late-Victorian magnificence of their Madison Ave. home, must have been a joyful, glorious and certainly continuously exciting adventure. It was made so, at least, in that remarkable series of essays in which the late Clarence Day introduced his sire to a world of readers just a few years ago. And now, dramatized with faithful adherence to the high spirit of the original stories, we have a stage play in which the senior Mr. Day will ride still further, in his loud and conquering fashion, into the hearts of all who see and hear him.

It is a delicate and sometimes dangerous operation to take the brilliant and beloved work of another man and attempt to bring it to three-dimensional life in the theater. My compliments today go to Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse who, far from distorting the gaily impudent picture of Father, have made it stand forth with clarity. As a reward for their integrity I believe they have—as they deserve—one of the season's smash hits.

That Life With Father, which was presented by Oscar Serlin at the Empire Theater last night, will be subjected to the complaint of some exacting technicians that it is lacking in plot I have no doubt. There is no more plot, in fact than you will find in The Time of Your Life. It is a family album, with Father's portraits predominating. Father in all his moods, Father declaiming his wrath against the corrupt city administration and frightening the new maid into falling down stairs; Father patiently and then in mighty exasperation attempting to teach Mother the

fundamentals of bookkeeping; Father in mellow humor over the goodness of the morning kippers and in a tantrum over the weakness of the morning coffee; Father in the continuous uproar over the monthly bills and as continuously baffled and defeated by the delicious middle-headedness (and strength of will and feminine wisdom) of his wife.

The threads that hold these portraits together are slender—so slender that they are scarcely noticeable. Actually we are treated to the experiences of five weeks in the Day home, in the course of which Father, a strict individualist, if there ever was one in the matters of religion, is forced against his will to undergo the rite of baptism, which had somehow been neglected in his youth.

Not all his blustering and fuming, nor all his violent attempts to frustrate his good wife's will in regard to this baptism avail him any escape. He is doomed from the start.

The problems of young Clarence Day, Jr., about to enter the freshman class at Yale, centering around a personable young female visitor to the Day home, and the necessity of procuring a new suit, for the courting, provide a sort of secondary theme. Realizing Father's unbending character you can understand and sympathize with Clarence who finds that Father's old suit, cut down to this size, will not permit him to indulge in any weaknesses, such as permitting the young lady to sit in his lap. Father's dignity is so overpowering that it permeates the very clothing he wears like a sort of moral moth-proofing.

Father's hatred of visiting relatives and his futile attempts to shorten or block entirely these unwelcome descents upon his peace provide further hilarious interludes, and the succession of four "new" maids whom Father frightens into disappearing adds to the magnificent picture of household confusion.

Nor have the authors neglected Father's inner goodness. The pathetic bewilderment with which he meets his wife's illness, emphasized by his profane contempt for the whole medical profession, is profoundly touching and the proof of his sincerity and love is found in his frightened willingness, even to undergo the torture of baptism—if his promise will restore her health.

The whole adventure, in short, is hilarious, but at many times deeply stirring. Certainly it has nostalgic quality that provides a fine undertone for this new conception of Father. Mr. Serlin has given the comedy a fine cast, headed by Mr. Lindsay, who is made up to look like a John Held, Jr., engraving. Mr. Lindsay plays the part explosively and, I am happy to say, in keeping with the image most of us had conceived from Clarence Day's original stories. Dorothy Stickney gave an outstanding portrayal of Father's wife Vinnie, and John Drew Devereaux and Richard Simon were true to life as Mr. Day's two eldest sons, Clarence and John.

I think you will love the entire Day family. Certainly you will not be frightened by Father's bluster. It's only his way.

"Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 9, 1939

"Life With Father" Delightful Comedy of a Gentler New York

"Life With Father," comedy by Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay, based on stories by the late Clarence Day, produced by Oscar Serlin at the Empire Theatre, New York, Nov. 3, 1939.

★ ★ ★+

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT IS a fortunate theatrical season that has two such plays as "The Man Who Came to Dinner" and "Life With Father," not only because they are immensely enjoyable, but also because by their very dissimilarity they make a pair.

"The Man Who, etc.," is funny because it is modern and nasty—written, as it were, in indelible ink. "Life With Father," which found a perfect setting last night at the Empire Theatre, is funny because it is of an earlier and more gentle time—written, every word of it, in the milk of human affection.

As everybody must know, the basis of the comedy is the series of family sketches of the 1880's by the late Clarence Day, practically all of which appeared in *The New Yorker* and which were published in volumes titled "Life With Father," "Life With Mother" and "God and My Father." The adaptation has been made, with respect, with a matching humor and with a warming knowledge of the theatre, by Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay.

A Family Chronicle

Not exhausted by the labor of adaptation, Mr. Lindsay also essays the role of Father himself and manages it capably. If Dorothy

Stickney, as Father's wife, contrives to steal the show it certainly must be all right with him, for Miss Stickney is Mrs. Lindsay off-stage.

You get to writing family notes like this because the play is just a lot of family notes. Father was an actual person—Clarence Day Sr., one-time governor of the Stock Exchange. A blustering, quick-tempered, important man who liked his breakfast coffee just so; a man who stamped and belittled "Goddid!" about the house and wouldn't be baptized.

"Life With Father" hasn't much of a plot

because real families don't have any plots. They just have crises which look bad at the moment but which are amusing when others regard them from vantage points like time and orchestra seats. A red-headed tyrant with a lovable wife and four red-headed sons, he rules the roost only so long as Mrs. Day wants him to. Then she can drive him to cover with feminine illogic, blandishment, tears, or a woman's sure knowledge of when the enemy's guard is down.

Mother's the Boss

Mr. Lindsay's father, as has been intimated, is first class—although he could do with less red makeup on the cheeks and yet look effectively apoplectic. Miss Stickney is better than first class—the perfect mistress of a Madison Avenue brownstone mansion of the 1880's.

The other players have been chosen with good theatrical sense. John Drew Devereaux, as Clarence Day, Jr., is a not to overdrawn moon-calf who falls for a girl who comes visiting with Cousin Cora; Richard Simon, as his next younger brother, has two perfect moments in which to make his voice squeak; Teresa Wright makes an attractive visiting girl, and there's a series of maids whom Father frightens into quitting.

Stewart Chaney's one setting, the morning-room of the Day house, and his costumes, are delightfully made for the time and mood of the play. Bretaigne Windust has staged it with humorous insight—and Oscar Serlin makes a happy debut as a Broadway producer.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 9, 1939

Clarence Day's 'Life With Father' Dramatized by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOONER or later every one will have to see "Life With Father," which opened at the Empire last evening. For the late Clarence Day's vastly amusing sketches of his despotic parent have now been translated into a perfect comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, and must be reckoned an authentic port of our American folklore. They were as genuine as that when they first appeared in *The New Yorker*, and later between covers in book form. In the form of a narrative drama of family life Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have now pulled that immortal saga together, wonderfully preserving the humanity as well as the fantastic humor. Mr. Lindsay plays the part of the choleric parent with rare taste and solid heartiness, and Dorothy Stickney plays the part of the wife with enormous skill and spirit. Last evening every one was falling jubilantly in love with a minor classic in the library of American humor.

Written and acted with infinite dexterity, "Life With Father" is no cartoon out of the funny papers. Under all his rage, Father is a representative parent with a warm regard for his sons and real affection for his wife, and his portrait might come out of any family album. What makes him so hilariously amusing to us today is the violence of his temper. He is rugged individualism in full flower—passionately logical, humorless, possessive and masterful. He is the civilized male in awful grandeur. If Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse were less discerning as play-

wrights, Father might have emerged as a cheapjack bully to be played only for the laughs. But they treat him with relish and respect against the manners of the late nineteenth century as one of the leading stalwarts of a materialistic civilization. His shouting and swearing are assertions of his importance as a responsible citizen in a hustling period in native history.

The story of "Life With Father" gives a rounded portrait of the Day's old man. At breakfast you hear him roaring at the new maid and frightening her out of her wits, stamping on the floor three times to summon the cook from the kitchen, and delivering a long, frate speech about taxes and politics that would scare the daylight out of any one who took the trouble to listen.

That is the fierce part of Father. But the human side turns up in the course of the evening when his wife falls unaccountably ill and for a moment or two shatters his grand self-confidence. A good egg at heart, Father can rise to any domestic occasion.

The play is strewn with family crises natural to a house full of growing boys and tireless relatives, and Father punctuates the episodes with bellows of righteous anger. When he lets himself go, the other members of the family shiver a little, but their regard for the old codger never weakens. For he is the head of the house by virtue of his innate ability. No one questions his right to wear all the pants in the family.

In Mr. Lindsay's acting Father is completely defined. Although he is stiff, he is not pompous; although he is over-bearing, he is not insensitive. He is the high-spirited male of middle years who expresses his vitality in business-like procedure and runs the whole gamut of passion from sulkeness to ferocity. Miss Stickney's portrait of the wife is also brilliant acting, both sweet and witty, with a supple response to the storminess of her domestic economy. Under Bretaigne Windust's knowing direction, the performance is a thorough delight. John Drew Devereaux of the House of Drew gives an excellent performance as the oldest son. As the gawky second son, Richard Simon is also completely enjoyable and the same thing should be said for the other members of a splendid cast. Stewart Chaney has dressed them in costumes touched with humor and housed them in a gay nineteenth-century living room.

Clarence Day would have been proud of this stage version of his tribute to his father. The dialogue is sparkling, the story is shrewdly told, and the acting is a treasury of appreciative humor. Life with father may have been trying at black moments on Madison Avenue, but it is overpoweringly funny in the theatre. It is also enchanting, for "Life With Father" is a darlin' play.

"Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 9, 1939

"Life With Father" Seen at the Empire

Mr. Lindsay and Miss Stickney Appear in a Hilarious
Dramatization

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF, AS seems indisputable, the late Clarence Day was fortunate in his parents, all the rest of us stand in the elder Days' debt for their son. For it was he, of course, who, in "Life With Father" and "God and My Father," kindly removed the brown-stone front of the New York home he had known in the eighties, and allowed the nation's readers to claim Father and Vinnie as household gods, if not indeed as household pets.

It is Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse who have had the courage to dramatize Mr. Day's inimitable domestic sketches. And all things considered, including the bothersome preconceptions playwrights are bound to bring with them, the slowness of the introductory scene which finds the autocrat at his breakfast table, and a few later episodes which still stand in need of cutting, a heart-warming and delectable job Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have done.

If the result is not quite the same as in the books, it is none the less hilarious, touching, and uncommonly witty and perceptive. We have Mr. Day's own lines to thank for this. And excellent, truly sustaining lines they prove to be when spoken no less than when read. Yet there is a difference. In a way Mr. Day's family has on the stage ceased to be quite so much his personal property. It has lost to a certain extent in the acting the special breeding which distinguished it. It no longer seems quite so securely anchored in a period. It has become everybody's family instead of Mr. Day's. But the change, at least from the audience point of view, is doubtless all to the good. For instead of saying how like the Days our families were, theatregoers can now say how like our own families just now are the Days. In other

words, the ripple of application has altered by being widened. That is all.

Every Family's Portrait

It is the acting, particularly the thorough competent but by no means ideal performance of Howard Lindsay as Father, which nudges the text away from its original setting. It is Mr. Lindsay's red wig; his occasional stock company tricks, and the awareness of his acting Father instead of being him, which shrivels the potted plants somewhat of eavesdropping on the Days. And turns that household into something of a public gardens. It is the sheer effortful work of Mr. Lindsay, and from time to time the fitful, actress-y glances Dorothy Stickney steals across the footlights, which make one realize one is sitting before greasepaint and the work of the wigmaker and the costumer instead of eavesdropping on the Days.

Still, as hinted, the play at the Empire has its countless delightful and genuinely rewarding features in spite of what Mr. Day's wigs were fated to lose in performance. His truths have not lost either their

bite or their truth. Such is the wit of the acted text that it can not only sustain the changes in the major characterizations but forces one to overlook them gladly.

What one gets as one watches Father complaining about meals, losing servants, grumbling about expenses, objecting to visitors, reading the newspapers, exploding into endless tempers, suffering during his wife's illness, urging his oldest son to be firm with women, scoffing at his minister, and resolutely avoiding baptism, is a picture into which every family man fits, whether he likes to believe so or not. It is a full-length portrait of the male ego, with all of the laughable petty tyrannies exposed which that ego exercises within the fortress of those four walls over which any husband chooses to believe (and is artfully encouraged to do so) that he rules as a mixture of Von Hindenburg, the elder Rockefeller, and Santa Claus.

A Delightful Evening

Clarence Day knew better. So did his mother, Vinnie. That is where the fun—the abundant fun—comes in for all the members of any family wise enough to journey to the Empire these nights. For "Life With Father," when once it gets going, proves to be a play of universal appeal, of tremendous gaiety, and of sudden gusts of tender observation. Merely as a play it may be unimportant. But as a biography of every family, except the Milquetoast's, it is as shrewdly drawn as it is ingratiating.

Stewart Chaney has set it with infinite charm. And Bretaigne Windust has directed it with a nice sense of fearful no less than comic values. Mr. Lindsay faces an almost impossible task as Father. But he plays him so acceptably in an actor's way (which would no doubt have sent Father's blood pressure soaring) that one is more than willing to accept him as a substitute for Mr. Day's courtlier parent. Mr. Lindsay is industrious, frequently skillful, and almost always satisfactory enough. But at no time is he funnier than when in moments of final (and usually lonely) exasperation he cries out loud to his Creator.

Miss Stickney is a pleasant, chirrupy, and effective Vinnie. John Drew Devereaux is exceedingly good as young Clarence Day. And Dorothy Bernard is charming as Margaret, the cook. Indeed, the play is almost well enough suggested throughout so that there is no resisting Mr. Day's enchanting sketches as Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse adroitly assembled them in dialogic form.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 9, 1939

Father

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

FROM Clarence Day's delightful sketches of his father and mother and their relations with God and man, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have devised a gay, easy-going and likable comedy, filled to the brim with pleasant and recognizable Americans, circa 1880. No more a play in the conventional sense than is a play tossed off by Mr. Saroyan, "Life With Father" is merely a series of homely domestic cartoons, done with humor, understanding and deep affection, and given form and unity by the dominating personality of the elder Day, the family tyrant who never won a battle. There can be little doubt that the new play will be a success, if only for the fact that every woman playgoer, recognizing her own husband in the domineering, but vanquished, Father, will delight in it vastly. It will deserve that success, too, because it is rich in Americans and careful in characterization, virtues that more than make up for the fact that the comedy is sometimes desultory and the acting is not always as fine as it should be.

As any one who even glanced at one of the Day sketches will know, the new play is entirely dominated by Father, who rules over it in a fashion more unconquerable than he ever exercises in ruling his family. For Father, you will remember, was the least triumphant of dictators, his victories consisting chiefly of scolding off new servant girls. Domestic tyrants, even when they have hearts of gold, are not likely to be pleasant, even on the stage. Father, however, is so baffled in his rages, vanquished in his demands and beaten down in his wishes,

and yet always is so splendidly choleric and blustering about it, that he emerges as a winning, highly engaging and almost wistful fellow who is bossed so effectively by his wife and even his sons that you almost feel like coming to his help. In fact, all the episodes are considerably alike, in that they begin with Father raging and fuming and insisting on having his way and end with him in gallant but complete retreat. The fight he puts up longest is against being baptized, and even here he is battered down at last.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Mother wins all the victories in the household, Father is unquestionably its central figure. All the life of the Days centers around him. He must have been quite a man away from home, too, because he hasn't much trouble with outsiders. When the minister, for example, tries to boss him, the clerical gentleman is sent flying in short order and Father's victory is a most

pleasant one. In fact, his feud with the deity of official religion is courageously and handsomely fought, and Father gives in finally, not through any prowess on the part of the Providence but because Mother always seems to have had her deceptively gentle way in the Day family. You cannot help enjoying Father as he storms at the breakfast table, denounces absent political bosses, tries desperately to explain to Mother the mystery of charge accounts, snarls at officious clergymen and is reduced from the picture of masculine strength to the picture of masculine weakness by a woman's tears. My only complaint, in addition to my feeling about Mr. Lindsay's performance in the leading role, is that the play has its share of feeble interludes during which "Life With Father" becomes a sort of minor league "Ah, Wilderness."

Mr. Lindsay, the co-author, is good enough as Father to make the role winning and indomitable, but he somehow fails to make the elder Day the epic fellow that he must have been. There is not enough power or zest or breadth of characterization; not enough of the capacity to project the racy grandeur of the fabulous hero of Mr. Day's sketches. The result is that while the central characterization is attractively played, you have the feeling that the role should somehow have been invested with more variety and variety and power. The others are more successful, particularly Miss Dorothy Stickney as Mother, John Drew Devereaux as the youthful Clarence and Richard Simon as brother John, whose voice is changing. Miss Teresa Wright is a pretty and properly gentle ingenue, and I can't quite forgive Father for frightening such a nice, young maid as Miss Katherine Bard out of the house in the first scene. "Life With Father" is an agreeable addition to the stage's collection of affectionate Americana, which might have been better but is pretty satisfying as it is.

"The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 17, 1939

"The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Rocks Music Box With Laughter

"The Man Who Came to Dinner," comedy by Moss Hart and George Kaufman. Produced by Sam Harris at the Music Box, New York, Oct. 16, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Messrs. Moss Hart and George Kaufman will not have to worry much about "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which arrived at the Music Box last night.

It is for all the stress that has been laid upon its being a friendly libel of Alexander Woolcott, his eccentricities, his wit, his temperamental explosions and such atrocious manners as he is reported to indulge on occasion for the entertainment of his social stooges, a good comedy for any audience.

Last night, of course, it had its own picked and perfect crowd. All the Woolcott friends were there, and all the friends of the authors as well. It is a group that overlaps pretty generously, so there was a good deal of the "How're you, darling?" "It's nice to see you, darling," sort of greeting.

But the laughter that rocked the Music Box did not come exclusively from this crowd. Nor was it inspired by friendliness. It came from normally happy playgoers who like their fun touched with a certain sophistication and edged with those boldnesses in speech that startle without offense.

The situation of a flaring ego-maniac who slips on a bit of ice on the doorstep of a toadying society climber the night he is invited to dinner, and is marooned in the lady's

house for six weeks, is a solid foundation for natural comedy.

The Messrs. Hart and Kaufman exaggerate the possibilities somewhat, though much less, I think, than they did with their riot of two seasons ago, "You Can't Take It With You." Yet they get much the same audience response.

Good Fun

This is especially true of the early scenes, when the introduction of the impossible Sheridan Whiteside, as he takes charge of his host's home, frightening the family into submission by his threat of a suit for snor-

mous damages because they left the ice on their doorstep, is a succession of howls.

Later there is a touch of sentiment to hold the story together and a skilful contriving of situations that bring such entertaining personalities into the picture as John Hoyerdradt, dashing off a gentle imitation of Noel Coward, and Carol Goodner to play a charmer of men and a foil for Whiteside's sexy compliments.

The second act is lively comedy, with a broadcasting satire at its curtain that is fairly riotous. The third act has been rewritten to its improvement since I was a previewer of the play in Hartford two weeks ago. And the concluding curtain, though it is crowded a bit by a previous scene with a mummy case, is still one of the best laughs of the evening.

Good Cast

The playing is authoritative and nicely directed by Mr. Kaufman. There is a good deal of movement without the action becoming confused, which is important in comedy. Monty Woolley is an excellent choice for the Whiteside part. He suggests both the character and the class of the popular lecturer and wit.

Edith Atwater plays the cynical secretary with fine scorn and Ruth Vivian is perfectly cast as a lightly unbalanced sister who fits in with the Woolcottian passion for colorful eccentricities who can make an art of murder.

Theodore Newton is the sturdy juvenile and there are short parts nicely realized by Mrs. Priestley Morrison, Dudley Clements, LeRoy Operti, David Burns, Edmonia Nolley and George Lessey. The Genslager setting is attractive.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 17, 1939

Man Who Came to Dinner Will Stay a Long Time

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Man Who Came to Dinner will remain longer than I dare to predict, for the fabulous George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart once more have drawn from the bottomless wellspring of their wit the most sparkling and intoxicating dramatic concoction since You Can't Take It With You.

The new caricature of life, a vast and gusty lampoon, clever and vindictive, blithe and malicious, has no plot to speak of save that a man is thrust by accident into the home of certain unwilling hosts in Maassillon, Ohio, and that he makes himself thoroughly obnoxious to everybody within shouting range.

But upon this slender foundation Kaufman and Hart have reared another madhouse. Sober analysis (if such a thing were possible in connection with the new play at the Music Box) could easily tear to pieces this crazy theatrical structure, but by the time the last curtain falls — and long before — there are no sober analysts left in the audience. They are dazed, hypnotized and almost suffocated in their own laughter.

According to the cognoscenti, the man who came to dinner is roughly—very roughly—fashioned after a distinguished litterateur, radio raconteur, erstwhile drama critic, collector of celebrities and connoisseur de cuisine. In the next breath, but separated from the previous statement for reasons having to do with the laws of libel, it is said on good authority that Mr. Alexander Woolcott was importuned to play the role.

Be that as it may, Kaufman and Hart, with the good offices of Sam Harris who provided

an exceptionally good cast, give us as the central figure of their play a modern literary Falstaff, roundly proportioned and full of what we call temperament when applied to genius, and dirty disposition when applied to ordinary mortals. He is a man who sees with epigrammatic brilliance at one moment and with fiendish malevolence at the next, who is as sentimental as a crooner and as cynical as a female playwright, as syrupy as a cream-of-mush radio announcer and as truculent as a Hitler.

The character of Sheridan Whiteside fairly explodes upon the stage at the moment of his entrance, shortly after he has injured his hip by falling on the steps of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, "in a small town in Ohio." Thereafter, in a course strewn with invective and satire and punctuated by general insults, he takes over the house like

an army of occupation, infesting it with secretaries, actresses, actors, radio engineers and cockroach colonies. He incites the son and daughter of the house to run away. He threatens to sue his unfortunate host for \$200,000. He drives his nurse to abandon her profession and enter a munitions factory so that the human race may be destroyed rather than saved. He attempts, for his own purposes, to smash the romance of his girl secretary and the small town newspaper man with whom she has fallen in love. And only in that does he meet his Waterloo.

All this is accomplished on the stage with all the ingenious lunacies the Messrs. Kaufman and Hart are capable of devising, and its farce still remains plausible. It is gross caricature, to be sure, but like all caricatures, it merely emphasizes human absurdity. There is a delightful moment, for instance, when that excellent farceur, John Hoyerdradt, is introduced upon the stage for little practical purpose than to deliver a devastating lampoon of Noel Coward; and another when David Burns seems to give us a composite picture of all the Marx Brothers rolled into one character. And there is a howling second-act curtain wherein, after Whiteside has completed his work of malevolent destruction, he begins his tender Christmas Eve broadcast to the accompaniment of six white-robed choir boys singing Holy Night.

The riotous satire is given a pungent, sharp and witty performance by Monty Woolley. There is a glitter in his eye and venom on his tongue. And when you consider that three-fourths of his lines are delivered from a wheel chair, and yet his work is never static, you realize that this is one of the truly great comic performances of our times.

The entire cast, in fact, is in keeping with the tone of the play. Edith Atwater, as the Great Man's secretary is beautifully cast and responds to every opportunity. Carol Goodner, returning from England, brings great talent home to Broadway again. Theodore Newton is altogether in the spirit of the harlequinade, and David Burns makes his brief third-act appearance something to be remembered.

All in all, Broadway is safe for another year.

"The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 17, 1939

'The Man Who Came to Dinner' Opens at the Music Box

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MOSS HART and George S. Kaufman, the unregenerate, are no respecters of persons, Alexander Woolcott or the limitations of the human diaphragm. They will sacrifice all these, putting the last under almost intolerable strain, if they can only puncture the air with jests. The air around the Music Box was rattled last evening, as "The Man Who Came to Dinner" arrived there.

It is an excruciating compendium of scurrility, and nobody can politely pretend that Mr. Woolcott is not the chief butt of it, a fact about which Mr. W. can afford to be jovial. The authors have wrapped all the legends about him into one package, and named the package Sheridan Whiteside, but they chastise with admiration. And they have made him the unchallenged hero of a joltingly funny play.

Their Mr. Whiteside is marooned in Ohio at Christmas time, hailed by an injured hip as he darts from lecture platform to Hollywood, closely pursued by radio technicians and telephone calls from Europe. He has been inveigled to dinner by Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, and when he falls in front of their house and has to stay for weeks they are at first filled with happy anticipation. But they reckon without Mr. Whiteside—without his ingenious insults, his incredible effrontery, his abashing sentimentality and the deviousness of his stratagems. They also reckon without his friends, which include gentlemen who bear surprising, but no doubt superficial, resemblances to Noel Coward and Harpo Marx.

I cannot begin to tell you all that happens, after a slightly static opening scene in which Mr. Whiteside spurts engaging but scurrilous insults from the safety of a wheel chair. I would not if I could, for this farce and surprise is to be cherished. Mr. Whiteside's

pretty secretary falls in love with the town's newspaper man, of course. And Mr. Whiteside tries to break it up, of course. He imports the perilous Lorraine as a counter-bribe, and is outwitted and outwitted in turn. But the odd fate which he and Banjo—now really, Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart—cook up for Lorraine when they decide to set things right you must be left to discover on your own.

The humor is, of course, largely the humor of insult, and a good deal of it is of the knock-down-and-drag-out variety. But satire runs along with buffoonery. Mr. Whiteside's Christmas Eve broadcast is a thing of joy and he is delightfully ghoulish in his pursuit of old murderers. A nice twist comes out of that last, incidentally, and helps set matters right. Outrageous things are said and done by "The Man Who Came to Dinner" and his associates, but it is all in good, rough sport and if Mr. Woolcott can take it so can you. It's all great fun, and faster and funnier as it goes along.

Monty Woolley has the title role and performs it grandly and is wise enough, not to attempt too much parody. Edith Atwater,

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

A comedy in three acts by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman; setting by Donald Oenslager; directed by Mr. Kaufman; presented on October 16, 1939, at The Music Box by Sam H. Harris. The cast:

Mrs. Ernest W. Stanley..... Virginia Hammond
Miss Preen..... Mary Wickes
Richard Stanley..... Gordon Merrick
June Stanley..... Barbara Woodell
John..... George Probert
Sarah..... Mrs. Priestley Morrison
Mrs. Dexter..... Barbara Adams
Mrs. McCutcheon..... Edmonia Nolley
Mr. Stanley..... George Jessel
Maggie Cutler..... Edith Atwater
Dr. Bradley..... Dudley Clements
Sheridan Whiteside..... Monty Woolley
Harriet Stanley..... Ruth Vivian
Bert Jefferson..... Theodore Newton
Prof. Metz..... LeRol Operti

Luncheon Guests..... Phil Sheridan
..... William Postance
Mr. Baker..... Carl Johnson
Expressman..... Harold Woolf
Lorraine Sheldon..... Carol Goodner
Sandy..... Michael Harvey
Beverly Carlton..... John Hoyrardt
Westcott..... Edward Fisher
Radio Technicians..... Rodney Stewart
..... Daniel Leone
..... Jack Whitman
..... Daniel Landon
Six Young Boys..... DeWitt Purdie
..... Robert Rea
Banjo..... David Burns
Two Deputies..... Phil Sheridan
A Plainclothesman..... William Postance

John Hoyrardt, Carol Goodner, Mary Wickes, Mrs. Priestley Morrison, Theodore Newton and a dozen others play with skill and relish, and Mr. Kaufman has directed it with a cunning hand. But if I were either Mr. Hart or Mr. Kaufman I'd keep a sharp eye on Mr. Woolcott. That whirling noise you hear is Mr. Woolcott sharpening some phrases of his own.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 17, 1939

Visiting Ogre

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE comedy of insult reaches a high peak of merriment in the new Kaufman and Hart play called "The Man Who Came to Dinner." On the surface, that particular type of humorous writing seems to present a simple pattern. All that is necessary is for the central character to insult everyone else in the cast for two acts, and then in the third to have all of them turn around and insult him. It really isn't as easy as that, though. The danger is that the humor may become monotonous and the central character unbearable. The Messrs. Kaufman and Hart deserve all the more credit, therefore, for making their comedy genuinely hilarious, since they certainly do not fail to make their hero odious. Wisely they have permitted the invective heaped upon the shoulders of their Sheridan Whiteside to be savage enough to satisfy any audience, and they have let the fun die down but rarely. "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is merely an acid portrait of one of the authors' pals, and it is as filled with laughter as any play we are likely to see this year. Chalk up a new hit for the oncoming new season.

According to the proud confession of the authors, their hero and victim is the eminent Mr. Alexander Woolcott, who can also dish it out. Since Mr. Woolcott, who is said to be sometimes sensitive as to what is written about him, doesn't seem to mind in this particular case, then there is no reason why we should. After all, it is probably pretty flattering to have George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart write a full-length play about you, even if the portrait is fairly savage upon occasion. Anyway, Sheridan Whiteside,

who may or may not possess certain of the qualities of Mr. Woolcott, is given credit for resource, a neat if nasty wit, a sugary prose style, a gargantuan selfishness, a lot of distinguished friends, a vast radio audience and, of all things, a beard. What the authors seem to be saying of their pal is that he is a swell fellow and all that and they love him, but in his modest way he is rather a rat. To demonstrate such a flattering thesis, they show him to you when he is taking over for the duration of his wounds the home of some people at whose threshold he had fallen and smashed himself, though not to bits.

Mr. Whiteside is not to be moved for six weeks, and so he stays there in the living room of poor Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, insulting the household, receiving such friends as Noel Coward, Harpo Marx and a certain stage star who had better be nameless here; growing alternately petulant and bullying and almost making a mess of the life of his faith-

ful girl secretary. Although the plot includes such an active incident as the removal of the trouble-making actress in a mummy case, there isn't a great deal of story in "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and it isn't needed. For here, the Kaufman-Hart wit, ingenuity and gift for observing their friends sardonically are working admirably, and the result is that the play is decidedly funnier, if far less likable than "You Can't Take It With You." In truth, I think I should have to go back to the same gentleman's "Once in a Lifetime" for its equal in festivity. Despite lagging moments here and there, it is almost consistently good, smart, brittle fun.

As in all of the plays with which Mr. Kaufman is concerned, the casting is excellent. There had been some talk that Mr. Woolcott was going to display his capacity for martyrdom by playing the leading role himself. I am glad that he resisted the temptation, for surely it is much better for us all to have the expert Monty Woolley, the renowned Yale professor, in the all-important part. Looking more like the late Edward VII than ever, the hirsute Mr. Woolley performs with fine relish, making Sheridan Whiteside's complete monster but keeping him strangely bearable. The lesser characters are invariably well played, but I think there should be a particular word for the straightforward charm and intelligence with which Miss Edith Atwater invents the long-suffering secretary.

Miss Carol Goodner is admirable, too, as the predatory lady who is spirited off in the mummy case, and there is good work by John Hoyrardt as Mr. Coward, David Burns as a character thinly disguised as Banjo, Theodore Newton as a reporter and Miss Mary Wickes as a nurse who turns on her oppressor. A mysterious lady is amusingly impersonated by Miss Ruth Vivian. Incidentally, a brilliant parody of a Noel Coward song ends the proceedings at one point. "The Man Who Came to Dinner" comes under the head of a smash hit.

"The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 17, 1939

"The Man Who Came To Dinner" Produced

Mr. Woolley in Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's Hilarious Comedy

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THAT Alexander Woolcott is the author, lecturer, critic, and radio performer Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman drew upon for their central character in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is about as much a state secret as that Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the person people have in mind just now when they speak of the President of the United States. Yet there is another truth we hold to be self-evident. That is, the Messrs. Hart and Kaufman have been uncommonly fortunate in their choice of a hero.

If, at the Music Box, Sheridan Whiteside sounds and behaves suspiciously like Dr. Woolcott, this in itself, is a guarantee of excellent talk and entertaining antics. For, as every one must know who can either turn a dial or read the language, the good doctor is one of the most colorful personalities of our day. In any of his roles—as arsenic or old lace, as fugleman or executioner, as murder addict or humorous raconteur, as drama critic or book trumpeter, as charity lover or prestige destroyer, as sentimentalist or "old money"—he is a figure not in one million but in one hundred and thirty-three million.

Mr. Woolcott has had more than the inclination to be an individualist. He has had the gifts, too. All of us have long rejoiced in this knowledge. We have likewise known that Mr. Woolcott was also an actor because Mr. Behrman has twice persuaded the good doctor to lend his owlish person to the playing of Woolcottian ratiocinations and couch-dwellers behind the footlights. Even so, it was not until last night that Messrs. Hart and Kaufman forced us to realize that in addition to being a personage, Mr. Woolcott was also a play. And what a play "The Man Who Came to Dinner" proves to be!

A Delightful Evening

It is as gay, giddy, and delectable a comedy as our stage has seen in years. The sur-

est proof of its hilarity no less than its skill lies in the fact that it is a drama a clef to which no key is really needed. The door is open wide on laughter the whole time, regardless of whether or not you can read Noel Coward into Beverly Carlton and Harpo Marx into "Banjo" or are intimately acquainted with the legends of Woolcottia.

Having a pass-key is always flattering, and one can be turned to undeniable advantage even in this unbolted door. But without such a pass-key, it is possible to enter into the joys of "The Man Who Came to Dinner." It is a self-contained piece of writing for all its sidelights on a special group. Indeed, its characters are developed with such witty persuasion that, unless he is very careful when next he goes on tour, Mr. Woolcott stands far more in danger of being accused of modeling himself on the play than he does of hearing that the play has been modeled on him.

What Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have done is to imagine and develop all the complications which might arise if during one of his lecture trips such a figure as Mr. Woolcott were to slip on the ice, fall, and injure himself while having dinner with a small-town Ohio family, and be compelled thereafter to spend several weeks in the

household. With mustard gas cooing from his mouth in the form of speech, with his finger in every pie, with broadcasts to deliver, the family exiled upstairs, love affairs cropping up all around him, strange Christmas presents arriving by the score, and trans-Atlantic calls possible on the telephone beside him—what would such a legendary character do? Plenty. Of this you may be certain, especially after seeing Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's side-splitting imaginings which add up to form a kind of "Heliopolis" of the literati and prove a joy throughout.

Monty Woolley Excellent

His comedy is a joy not only because in it the "Master" speaks as unmistakably as if his words were coming from a Victrola record. It is a joy because one knows that a master is speaking even if one should not happen to know who the actual "Master" is. The wit, the malice, the invention, the sentimentality, the gift for phrasing, the lush purr of his words give more than a unique quality to the dialogue. They spill over into the action, directing its course and giving it a similar fluidity.

It should not be assumed that "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is a one-character play. Anything but that. It includes some of the maddest as well as some of the best drawn of Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's eccentricities, and some of the most adroit of their developed scenes. Then, too, it rains because of its smooth-running, ever-helpful direction; because of Donald Oenslager's exceptionally contributive and distinguished setting, and the work of the actors. Monty Woolley is so excellent as the visiting lecturer that, for once, Mr. Woolcott had better look to his laurels. Although he was naturally nervous at the outset last evening when attempting a performance so ambitious and so long, Mr. Woolley soon grew in confidence and bearded the lion in his own den. He was in turn suave, charming, astringent, rude, and properly lacking in group consciousness. He did an heroic job with skill and infinite finesse.

Grateful mention must be made, too, of Mrs. Wickes' convulsing trained nurse of Mrs. Priestley Morrison's humorous and yet touching maid, of Carol Goodner's ant-pestered actress, of Theodore Newton's ingratiating small-town journalist, of Edith Atwater's admirably played secretary, of David Burns' droll "Banjo," and, of course, of John Hoyes' sharply etched young British playwright who sings a song that Noel Coward songs which is as uproarious as it is devastating.

All in all, the evening is a genuinely superior one, the kind of evening which justifies one's faith in commercial Broadway because it finds it at its topnotch best.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 17, 1939

Moss Hart, George S. Kaufman Discuss "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHETHER or not it is the funniest comedy Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman have written is probably a matter of opinion. But it is a fact that "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which opened at the Music Box last evening, is the funniest comedy of this season, and is likely to remain so long after the competition has grown stiffer. Taking Alexander Woolcott in one hand, which is no mean feat, and the disorderly style of "You Can't Take It With You" in the other, Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have put together a fantastic piece of nonsense, with enough plot to serve and a succession of witty rejoinders to keep it hilarious. Since Father Christmas hesitates about playing the part himself, the saturnine Monty Woolley is presiding over the comedy with wonderful aplomb and his own whiskers. Every one seemed thoroughly delighted in Times Square last evening.

Although the story is imaginary, the characterization is a chip off the old Woolcott block. As the authors tell it, a fabulous lecturer, coming unwillingly to dinner in an Ohio town, slips on the ice, fractures something or other and has to stay as an invalid

on the premises. He is down but not exactly out. For he despotically takes over the house from the indignant hosts and turns it into an asylum for his friends, his satellites and his querulous intrigue. The principal intrigue concerns an attempt to forestall his secretary's plan to marry. But that is no more than a clothesline on which this vaudeville is pinned and left hanging in the breeze.

No one would say that this is a portrait done in the oil of affection. Neither is it

etched in acid. It is done out of relish for the bountiful mischief and the sharp tongue of the nation's town crier. For a rounded portrait something would have to be done for the good works that Woolcott squanders lavishly as his old juggernaut goes rolling across the country, knocking down defenseless bores and jostling the celebrities. But this chronicle of a radio publicist, turning testily on his nurse, bombing his startled doctor, match-making and match-unmaking, plotting deviously and always talking with brilliant sardonic wit, is one that theatre-goers are going to relish as much as Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have, and probably Woolcott will also cherish it as one of the fabulous jokes in his Dickensian career.

...

Having a sense of humor of his own, Mr. Woolley plays the part in the grand manner with dignity and knavery. Among other things, it is a literary part, and the Woolley as well as the Woolcott knows how to speak lines. Under Mr. Kaufman's direction, the comedy goes rollicking across the stage in the wake of some excellent actors. Edith Atwater plays the part of the spirited secretary with a sincerity that gives the comedy a genuine feeling. Carol Goodner is vastly amusing as a terminant actress. John Hoyes is excellent in Noel Coward bit, and David Burns does something amusing with a Harpo Marx item in spite of Harpo's presence in the audience last evening.

Inside a single setting by Donald Oenslager, the comedy has been pulled tautly together into an evening of astringent merry-making. It is American in its comic tone. Broadway craftsmanship, and a roaring evening of literate hilarity into the bargain.

"Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 23, 1938

'Hellzapoppin,' a Rowdy Revue, Is Offered at the Forty-sixth Street Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AS MUCH bedlam as one theater can reasonably be expected to hold was created at the Forty-sixth Street last evening by a largish troupe of performers, most of them refugees from radio and almost all of them armed with blank-cartridge revolvers. People ran up and down the aisles shouting, a detached female roamed the auditorium calling out for "Oscar," and a perplexed gentleman rolled around the stage all evening in a strait-jacket.

This small segment of chaos is described by its originators as "Hellzapoppin," which seems to describe it pretty well. Almost everything else is poppin, too.

Balloons burst from time to time, and on one occasion the audience is showered with beans. The boxes are almost constantly in use by performers and apparitions and there's no doubt the whole business will keep you awake, and jumpy. There is nothing static about this show. It spends most of its time exploding in your ears.

This certainly does not provide a soothing evening, nor the privacy one is accustomed to in the quiet of the orchestra seats. It does, however, provide a good bit of pretty hysterical fun and a fair share of good vaude-

ville acts. There is a trick cyclist in it, and several good card tricks and Olsen and Johnson of the radio, who not only got the affair together but act in it as masters of ceremony and comedians in chief.

They joke and mug, often comically, and join in threatening the audience. Now and then they sing, too. Walter Nilsson, an old vaudevillian, rides one-wheeled bicycles, and also a gadget which has two feet—he has also a bicycle with square wheels. Four colored boys called the Charlotteers sing a me-

'HELLZAPOPPIN'

A revue in two acts; music and lyrics by Sammy Fain and Charles Tobias; presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on September 22, 1938, by Olsen and Johnson. The cast includes Olsen and Johnson, Barto and Mann, the Radio Rogues, Hal Sherman, Ray Kinney, the Aloha Maids, Bettymae and Beverly Crane, the Charlotteers, Theo Hardeen, Walter Nilsson, the Starlings, Reed, Dean and Reed, Shirley Wayne, Whitley's Stoppers, Bergh and Moore, Roberta and Ray, Hardeen, and many others.

lodiou, and oddly argumentative, song about Lincoln, and the three Radio Rogues do imitations of people on the radio, about most of whom this department knows virtually nothing. Two young sopranos sing, while Bettymae and Beverly Crane, pretty youngsters from the movies, dance in a sprightly fashion. Hal Sherman dances, too, as do three little maids from Hawaii, and four white pigeons, left over from one of the parlor tricks, thoughtfully pace the stage.

When this tends to quiet down, as often enough it does, Mr. Olsen or Mr. Johnson fires off a pistol, or a clown saunters into the audience or an orang-utan appears in a stage box—never an idle moment, nor a quiet one. Something going on all the time, and a pretty chorus to boot.

There is no way I can think of to sum it up—it is rowdy and confused and uneven, and does produce, particularly at first, excellent merriment. It is cheerfully free of revue stateliness; the music is just a pleasant noise and the sketches have more dash than wit. It is an agreeable enough hurly-burly, but no place to take jumpy nerves.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 23, 1938

"Hellzapoppin" Reaches The Forty-sixth Street

Messrs. Olsen and Johnson Stage a Revue Which Begins Well and Ends Badly

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"HELLZAPOPPIN"! For the first hilarious half-hour last night it seemed as if this were really true. The Forty-sixth Street Theatre was a madhouse for that length of time. Pandemonium reigned. Pistols were popping all over the place. Bombs were exploding. Lunacy was rampant.

Crazy newsreels disclosed Mr. Roosevelt, Hitler, and Mussolini indorsing (sometimes in strange dialects) the Messrs. Olsen's and Johnson's new revue. The Seven Dwarfs competed with the new tenants of Krum Elbow for domination of the stage. The boxes bulged with stooges. The aisles were filled with "plants"—a woman who kept calling for Oscar, a ticket scalper who warned that good seats could still be had for "I Married an Angel," and mysterious beings who in a sudden moment of darkness pretended to drop spiders upon the necks of playgoers.

Everything was topsy-turvy. Nothing made sense. Vaudeville seemed to have come back to life in a hypomanic form—vaudeville combined with burlesque and touched with moonshine. Then suddenly "Hellzapoppin" went dead and died a terrible death. It died

young and in painful convulsions, the victim of its own energy.

And Sudden Death

It started off by being madder than any of Rube Goldberg's inventions, but it exploded soon after it had been cranked. It gave out of fuel. It jostled its passengers into a coma. It shook itself to pieces. All too soon it became apparent that, though it had set off at a terrific speed, it was going nowhere. From

then on it remained stationary. It sputtered and shook every now and then. But it had long since ceased to operate. One was as delighted to leave it as one had been overjoyed to greet it. It ended up by giving its audiences as bad a time as it had given the rabbit and the pigeons included in its cast.

The truth is that Olsen and Johnson seem to be better gag men than comics. Although their nonsensical ideas are fertile and commendably daft, their personalities are not of a kind to expose them to fullest advantage. They rush energetically from one antic to another with breathless energy, yet the effect is much the same as if in a Katzenjammer saga the cartoonist had forgotten to fill in the features of "Der Kaptain" and the kids.

That they are negative, in spite of their superior zest, is not the only thing working against the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson when they turn revue-makers. They have recruited from vaudeville and night clubs, but mainly from the radio, a large company, many members of which have talent. The Charlotteers possess fine voices. The Radio Rogues are clever mimics. Little Billy Adams is a droll Negro stepper. Hal Sherman can pantomime amusingly. Shirley Wayne handles a fiddle entertainingly. Walter Nilsson is an astonishing cyclist. Hardeen, Houdini's brother, has inherited some good tricks. Barto and Mann are certainly of different size. And Bettymae and Beverly Crane are charming dancers.

BUT, the revue in which these worthies appear is badly put together. It lacks editing. It is overwhelmingly long. Its lapses from taste are almost as frequent as its lapses from interest. It is all introduction and very little revue. If it is more amusing than "You Never Know" (which it unquestionably is), it is still very far from being a satisfactory musical. It ends up by turning against it even those stanch friends it had made during its happily insane first half hour. As a friend turned enemy, I warn you here with the loss before it is over "Hellzapoppin" proves to be the very opposite of what for a few blissful minutes it promises to be.

"Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 23, 1938

Bedlam Follies

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SOMETHING called "Hellzapoppin," at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, may be a revue or it may be vaudeville or it may be the modern equivalent of Mark Twain's Royal Nonesuch, but at least it lives up to its name. It plunges all over the stage, up and down the aisles and through the upper boxes with much sound and fury, leaving a considerable trail of violent nonsense in its wake. It is, in fact, decidedly at its best when it forgets to be a revue with blackouts and sister teams, and permits its insanity full play. When the actors are firing off revolvers, hitting you in the back of the neck with puffed rice, writhing about in straitjackets or offering to sell you tickets to other shows, "Hellzapoppin" is in its properly maniac mood. When it shows you news reels of Hitler and Mussolini, with the former talking in Jewish accents and the latter in deep Harlem tones, it is nothing short of marvelous. But when it goes in for some of its vaudeville sketches, it is merely depressing.

Another thing that can be said for "Hellzapoppin" is that it supplies a perfect test for those sentimental playgoers who say they lament the death of vaudeville. If you love the new show at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, there can be no doubt that you are sincere in lamenting that demise. For here is the corpse sitting up and thumbing its nose at you and at the world and indulging in ribald outcries and gesticulations. There ap-

peared to be no doubt that the first-night audience responded enthusiastically to the Bedlam Follies that the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson provide. To me, however, it seemed that while much of the madness was cheerful, hearty and enlivening, the greater part of it depended on the mere fact of its madness and didn't succeed in being funny. Certainly it isn't very good when it goes in for song and dancing, save in the case of the terpsichorean efforts of the comic Hal Sherman and of three Hawaiian girls, particularly the one in the center in the first-act finale.

A vital test of your enjoyment of the show lies in your attitude toward the stars and producers, Olsen and Johnson. My own guess is that these vaudeville veterans are exuberant and hard-working performers, but something less than first-rate comedians. Like their revue, they frequently make the mistake of thinking that madness without humor is a good enough substitute for mad humor. I doubt, too, if they are good selectors of comedy sketches. A few good blackouts would certainly have been welcome in "Hellzapoppin." All in all, I was very much disappointed in the new revue, even though I would be deceiving you if I did not confess that I enjoyed the man in the straitjacket, was interested in the gorilla that pursued the girl in the upper box and thought that the news reel of Hitler and Mussolini was among the great comic inventions of recent seasons.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 23, 1938

"Hellzapoppin" Old Time Variety With a Touch of Minsky

"Hellzapoppin," a vaudeville revue assembled and produced by the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson at the 46th St. Theatre, New York, Sept. 22, 1938.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Olsen and Johnson idea promised good fun. They gathered together a collection of variety acts, some old, some new, some clever, some stupid, which always has been a fair vaudeville average, and strung them together in a noisy revue.

They called it "Hellzapoppin" for one reason or another and presented it at the 46th St. Theatre last night.

The idea, as said, was promising, but the results are no better than fair. There is good entertainment in this "Hellzapoppin." Most of it happens early in the evening.

The boys start with as clever an opening as any revue has shown these many days—a reproduction of news reels of the world's leaders in speaking pose. Their moving lips are the lips of President Roosevelt, Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, John L. Lewis, etc., but their words are the words of a ribald jester behind the screen. The combination is original and hilarious.

Ribald and Abandoned

After that Olsen and Johnson became a couple of Joe Coons for a scene or two, introducing a series of ridiculous scenic novelties and a wardrobe of comic clothes.

They are utterly ribald and fearlessly abandoned. Never very smart but always very cheerful. Their show is old-time variety with a touch of burlesque, a dozen Grade B Orpheum acts routed over the Columbia Wheel. A noisy and irresponsible riot.

Half the show is performed in the aisles, with husky barkers passing through the audience with toy balloons, candy, chewing gum and souvenirs. An excited matron interrupts proceedings frequently to call lustily for her missing Oscar. It becomes necessary finally to execute Oscar. A lady on her way out is forced to explain that she is not quitting the

show; just going to the lady's room. Which will give you an idea of the Olsen and Johnson subtlety.

Such touches of refinement as "Hellzapoppin" boasts are furnished by sister acts, the Crane girls, the Reed girls and the Starlings. They are no more innocuous than most harmonizers and rather pretty, the Cranes particularly. The Cranes also contribute one of those mirror dances that grandmother used to love.

There is a trio of Radio Rogues. They imitate radio announcers, crooners and stars with considerable cleverness. There is a trio of Hawaiian dancers, with accompanying ukulele and crooner. Assisted by the ensemble, they present the most pretentious of the dance numbers.

Hardens, the mystifier, is present with disappearing hens, pigeons and pests. A colored quartet that manages to be pretty unmusical but impressively persistent. The Barto and Mann acrobatic dancers, who dirty things up a bit.

If you should feel like an evening of old-time vaudeville, or, being young, would like to know what old-time vaudeville was like, here's an evening for you. A little cotton in the ears might help.

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"Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 23, 1938

World Notables Burlesqued in New Revue, "Hellzapoppin"

Strident Music, Shots, Shouted Jokes and General Bedlam in
46th St. Like Times Sq. on New Year's Eve

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE is a lot of brass in the music that accompanies the new Olsen and Johnson revue, "Hellzapoppin," which opened last night at the Forty-sixth St. Theater, and there is a lot of brass in the noisy sketches that go to make up two and a half hours of rowdy vaudeville.

If some of the zip of this show were transferred to "You Never Know," and some of the softer candlelight scenes of the latter production were given to "Hellzapoppin" it would be very much to the advantage of each of them.

Some of the public may be able to survive an entire evening of din. A gentleman two seats away from me howled with delight through the whole show, and he was not, I am sure, being paid to howl. As for me, after half an hour of it, I longed for the peace and quiet of "Our Town," and as this review is written, my ears are still ringing.

First Act Is Funny

The first act is screamingly funny, perhaps because there are no humans in it. A talkie, purporting to show F. D. R., Hitler and Mussolini in violent harangues praising the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson and their revue—and how the speeches were dubbed in is a minor miracle of movie making—is satirical and hysteria-producing.

After that come the noise, the revolver shots, the banging on the tympani, the shouted jokes, the screaming stooges, the exploding automobiles and general bedlam. It becomes, as lively, to put it mildly, as Times Sq. on New Year's Eve, or on the third night of an Ameri-

can Legion Convention, when the boys are getting warmed up to their work.

This is not to say that there are not interspersed with the rowdy-dow free-for-all, a number of entertaining numbers. Once in a while you are given a moment to catch your breath, as, for example, when Bettymae and Beverly Crane go into their graceful dances, or "The Charlotteurs," a septet quartet, improve on the Mills brothers.

Evening's High Light

Again, as a high light of the evening, there are the "Radio Rogues," Jimmy Hollywood, Eddie Bartell and Sidney Chaston, who give a brisk and faithful interpretation of various radio and screen stars, among them Ken Baker, Ben Bernie, Walter Winchell, Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee and almost anybody you can mention, including the President.

The general tone and humor of the production, however, is about at the level of burlesque, and some of the broader exploits of the principals, and in particular those of an otherwise amusing team, Barto and Mann, should be eliminated—at once.

Many of the acts, including "The Maternity Ward," "Wall Street" and "Who's the Dummy" are silly, rather than funny, and will appeal only to the weak-minded, and some of the nonsense is repetitious. Trimming the jokes, cutting the scenes, eliminating the questionable lines and actions, all this would bring the production closer to sanity, which is what it needs.

Material for 2 Extravanzas

There is material enough here for two good musical extravanzas. Hal Sherman, the deadpan dancer, is worth seeing. So, in fact, are the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson—for fifteen minutes or so. It should be remembered, although the producers seem to have forgotten it, that old-time vaudeville, when it was good, varied the program. First slapstick, then a tear-jerker, a little melodrama, a "polite" song and dance, a little more comedy. Never bang-bang-bang the whole evening long.

The music is more forceful than melodious, although one or two songs by Sammy Fain and Charles Tobias have a lilt to them. The better of them are "It's Time to Say Aloha" and "When You Look in Your Looking Glass." The chorus is well trained and fairly good looking, and the dances are well done.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 23, 1938

'Hellzapoppin' Appears in Forty-sixth Street Under the Protection of Olsen and Johnson

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FOLKS, it is going to be a little difficult to describe this one. "Hellzapoppin" is what they call it and it was discharged at the Forty-sixth Street last evening.

Deciding that it might be a good idea to put on a show, Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, a pair of vaudeville knockabouts, stood on the corner of the street and stopped every third man. Those were their actors. Taking an old broom, they went up to the attic and swept out all the gags in sight. Those were their jokes. Dropping into an ammunition store downtown, they picked up several boxes of blank cartridges. Those were to indicate that the jokes had been told and that it was time to start laughing. Then they moved every-
thing in sight into the Forty-sixth Street Theater, got an audience down front and set them to laughing. Anything goes in "Hellzapoppin"—noise, vulgarity, practical joking—and about every third number is foolish enough for guffawing.

Very prominent in the proceedings are Olsen and Johnson, a pair of college cut-ups

now well on toward middle life without much flowering of their culture. As far as they are concerned, it is house-cleaning day in vaudeville. After a hilarious motion-picture prologue, in which some grotesque sounds and words come out of the pictures of F. D. R., the Little Flower, Hitler and Mussolini, Olsen and Johnson make their entrance in a clownish automobile and trailer and the uproar begins. It

pops out of all parts of the house. Up and down the aisles of the orchestra a persistent woman keeps shouting, "Oscar, Oscar!" in a tenement voice. A ticket speculator starts hawking good seats for "I Married an Angel." Eggs and bananas are tossed out to the audience, and when the lights go out the audience is besieged with spiders and snakes in the darkness. There is no relief even in the intermission. For that is the time when a clown starts paddling up the aisle and haunting unwary customers.

Probably the entertainment ought to show a higher trace of talent. The taste of "Hellzapoppin" runs to second-rate vaudeville turns, with chorus dancing of no particular consequence and some artful warbling by a pair of damsels sweetly billed as "The Starlings." Ornithologically speaking, starlings are likely to be shot or poisoned. But you can see some mighty fine monocycling by Walter Nilsson and some rogushtap dancing by Hal Sherman, and you can hear some lymphatic fiddling by Shirley Wayne, who looks as though she were just on the point of frying a mess of doughnuts. Hardden is there to astonish the innocent with some prodigious feats of magic.

But this is mainly a helter-skelter assembly of low-comedy gags in an ear-splitting sound accompaniment—some of it ugly, all of it fast. It is a revue concocted of what Al Graham described in yesterday's Conning Tower as "stewed fish-eyes and ragforn." "I'll Say She Is" was funnier three many years ago because the Marx Brothers were in it. But if you can imagine a demented vaudeville brawl without the Marx Brothers, "Hellzapoppin" is it, and a good part of it is loud, low and funny.

"Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 5, 1933

Henry Hull in "Tobacco Road," Based On the Novel by Erskine Caldwell

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE it is based on a novel, "Tobacco Road," which was acted at the Masque last evening, is not an organic play. Although Jack Kirkland has turned it into three acts, it is still Erskine Caldwell's novel at heart, which is to say that is more like a soliloquy with variations than a dramatic character sketch. Under Mr. Caldwell's influence it is also one of the grossest episodes ever put on the stage. Once the theatre used to be sinful. But now it is the novel that ferrets out the abominations of life and exposes them for sale in the marketplace. The men of letters have stolen the dramatists' crimson badge; and the theatre has never sheltered a fouler or more degenerate parcel of folks than the hardscrabble family of Lester that lives along the "Tobacco Road."

But that is not a full and disinterested report of the Masque Theatre's current tenant. For Mr. Caldwell is a demonic genius—brutal, grimly comic and clairvoyant. No one has chronicled the complete degeneracy of the Georgia cracker with such inhuman detachment. He writes with the fiery sword. Although "Tobacco Road" reels around the stage like a drunken stranger to the theatre, it has spasmodic moments of merciless power

when truth is flung into your face with all the slime that truth contains. That is why Mr. Caldwell's grossness cannot be dismissed as morbidity and gratuitous indecency. It is the blunt truth of the characters he is describing, and it leaves a malevolent glow of poetry above the rudeness of his statement.

"Tobacco Road" is the saga of Jeeter Lester, a good-for-nothing farmer who still lives on the land his father and grandfather farmed. But it is no longer his. Being lazy and dissolute, he has lost everything and now exists with his tattered family in the dirt and filth of a rickety shack. The Lesters are ragged, foul, starving and lazy. But still Jeeter preserves that fluency of talk and fecundity of crack-brained ideas and that animal sensuality which live in the lower darkness. Everything exists on the same plane of inhumanity. Even death leaves no impression upon life that is dead in everything save the body.

As Jeeter Lester, Henry Hull gives the performance of his career. For years Mr. Hull has been charming and trivial about many things and singularly obtuse about some others. But here is a character portrait as mordant and brilliant as you can imagine. Dressed in loathsome rags, untidily bearded and heavily wrinkled, Mr. Hull's Georgia cracker staggers through a whole gamut of emotions and passions—pungent, pathetic, horrible and gargantuanly comic.

The performance is shabbily directed. But it includes an excellent portrait of a headlong boy by Sam Byrd and a picturesque setting by Robert Redington Sharpe. Plays as clumsy and rudderless as "Tobacco Road" seldom include so many scattered items that leave such a vivid impression.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 5, 1933

Tragedy Runs Deep In "Tobacco Road"

Play Dealing with Poor Whites of Georgia Too Dolorous To Be Viewed Seriously.

By ROBERT GARLAND

YOU'LL be glad you aren't in Dixie when you see the play Jack Kirkland has founded on Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road," a novel highly spoken of by the novel-reading cosmopolite. Away down South in the land of cotton they're looking forward to the depression.

The Lesters are, at any rate. Or they would be if, in the back country of their native Georgia, they had ever heard of it.

They haven't heard of it, however, being all hemmed in by a superior depression of their own. In my theatre-going days I am yet to see a more feckless family than these Lesters Mr. Kirkland inherited from Mr. Caldwell. Outstanding members of the hangdog and hookworm set, they enjoy as superior miseries as the drama has so far known. They're in the lower lower depths.

Reading from left to right and back again, they're miserable Southerners, and there's no health in them. And no wealth, either.

Being as God, the civil war or Mr. Caldwell made them, they won't do anything about it. Not they! From Grandma Lester, who lives a life akin to that of the subterranean mole, to Grandson Dude Lester, who is partial to the bouncing of balls and the blowing of automobile horns, the Lesters prefer to be peculiar in their quaint back-country way. It is, you gather, an old Georgian custom.

Much Happens Between Doxing Spells

When the curtain rises at the Masque,

where "Tobacco Road" is playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia. When the curtain falls at the Masque, where "Tobacco Road" is still playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia. In between these doses almost everything has happened. Almost everything you can think of, and many a thing you can't.

Among the things you can think of is the old meanie who, in a derby and pretending not to be Jack Dalton, drops in from Augusta to take Jeeter Lester's farm from him. And the Dude Lester who, although a youngster, marries Sister Bessie Rice so as to come into possession of an automobile horn to play with. And the Sister Bessie Rice who marries in haste and repents immediately.

And the Pearl of great price—seven dollars her husband paid for her—who, as far as she's concerned, is married in name only.

And Ada Lester who, married to Jeeter, wants a stylish new dress to wear to her own funeral. (She gets the funeral without the dress, which shows how relentless a relentless play can be.) And Lov Bensey, the only comparatively sane person in the Caldwell-Kirkland undertaking, who is poison to his Pearl of seven-dollar price. And Bill May, who belongs in one of those books the doctors are supposed to read.

Misery Beyond Old Russia's

The Russians—the misery-loving Russians of the good old Gorky-Dostoyevsky days—would be ashamed of the minor miseries of "The Lower Depths" and "The Brothers Karamazov." In the face of "Tobacco Road" they would. For the Georgians revealed last night are Gorky-Dostoyevsky Russians raised to the 5th degree. Singly and collectively they suffer from the Stephen Foster blues.

What I mean is that they're so doggone discouraged that life is just a bowl of hookworms marching Sherman-like through Georgia.

This and its accompanying tribulations would be considerably more discouraging were it not for the histrionics of Henry Hull. As the man who came back with whiskers Mr. Hull gives one of the finest performances of a career that has not been free of fine performances. In all such serio-comic plays—"serio" when written by a novelist and "comic" when translated into make-believe—it is difficult to grasp your characterization and hold it intact to the end.

This Mr. Hull does. In the surrounding cast I care for Sam Byrd, who goes in for automobile horns in a big way; for Margaret Wycherly, who bites the hand that wouldn't feed her, and for Ruth Hunter, who is called upon to do things Kraft-Ebbing never heard of. Reniece Rehan has several good reasons for being Pearl, and Dean Jagger had one good reason for being Lov Bensey. Mr. Jagger is underrated by Miss Rehan.

"Tobacco Road" is too tragic to be taken seriously. Like life, it is consistently incredible. And a trifle off key.

"Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 5, 1933

'Tobacco Road,' Dramatization of a Novel, Opens at the Masque Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ERSKINE CALDWELL'S burrowing among the facts of life in the Georgia backwoods was revealed to Broadway last evening in a play fashioned from his "Tobacco Road," by Jack Kirkland. At the Masque Theater it bears the same title and is concerned, in Mr. Caldwell's perhaps intentionally humorous way, with death, poverty, lust and deformity. These distressing misfortunes are rather loosely strung together in a lagging drama which quite frequently achieves the repulsive and seldom falls below the faintly sickening.

How closely it follows the novel I can only guess. Mr. Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" having forced me into a detour around the rest of his little stories. It seems, however, to have the flavor. It is a photograph and many insist an accurate enough photograph, of life among the Southern "poor whites." The scene is the exterior of the Lester farmhouse and the extremely dusty yard in front of it. The Lesters have, for several generations, been going into a sullen decline. Old Grandma Lester can now do no more than grovel wearily in the dust, until finally she summons the strength to totter out and die in the fields.

Jeeter Lester—who is painted full-length and excellently played by Henry Hull—is a shiftless no-count, who does a little stealing now and then. His wife wishes a stylish dress to die and be buried in. One of their daughters has a hare-lip and spends the first act in

squirring about in the dust, so expressing in her pretty way an avidness for the caresses of a neighbor boy who is married to her sister. The sister has beautiful yellow hair and a strong distaste for her husband. Another young Lester marries a buxom and amorous "lady preacher" because she promises to buy him a new car. Eventually he runs over his mother in the car and kills her. She, you may be sure, drags herself back to die in the dust in front of the house, giving up the ghost only after she has severely bitten her husband, thus forcing him to release the daughter with beautiful yellow hair, whom he had thought to return to her husband by force.

The casual indifference of the Lesters and their associates to all the horrors which sur-

'TOBACCO ROAD'

A play in three acts by Jack Kirkland; based on the novel by Erskine Caldwell; staged and presented at the Masque Theater by Anthony Brown.

The cast:
Jeeter Lester Henry Hull
Dude Lester Sam Byrd
Ada Lester Margaret Wycherly
Ellie May Ruth Hunter
Grandma Lester Patricia Quinn
Henry Peabody Ashley Cooper
Sister Bessie Rice Maude Odell
Lov Bensey Dean Jagger
Pearl Renelce Rehan
Captain Tim Lamar King
George Payne Edwin Walter

round them provides Mr. Caldwell's humor. Learning that his mother has disappeared, and only guessing that she may have wandered out into the brush fire, Jeeter remarks that he must go out and have a look for her one of these days. It has been suggested, in connection with the author's other works, that this casual attitude, and the excessive piling up of bizarre incidents in which he indulges, establish Mr. Caldwell as a satirist. Mr. Caldwell has already indignantly denied any such intention, assuring literary critics that they saw a good deal of humor in his books, which he didn't. If "Tobacco Road" is a fair sample, Mr. Caldwell does seem to have been unfairly dealt with. It is clear that his humor is almost entirely unintentional.

Mr. Hull is the only actor whose part is drawn as more than a "folkplay" type. Jeeter is, thanks both to the authors and the actor, fine sturdy character, acutely understood and skillfully presented. Miss Margaret Wycherly intones her role; Miss Ruth Hunter's squirmings were rather distressing to watch, although she was doubtless doing precisely what she was told; Sam Byrd plays adequately in the role of the boy. Others do what they can for a callow and unpleasant play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 5, 1933

Henry Hull Achieves Remarkable Stage Portrait of Southern Primitive

"Tobacco Road," drama by Jack Kirkland from a novel by Erskine Caldwell. Produced by Anthony Brown at the Masque Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1933.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

A TOBACCO road is a dirt road. It runs off from the civilized center of things into the depths of the plantation, where mostly primitives live and life is a shiftless, lazy, animal-like existence.

Jack Kirkland has taken a story from Erskine Caldwell's novel of a tobacco road in deep Georgia and put it into play form. Called it "Tobacco Road," reasonably enough. And it, too, is a shiftless, lazy, animal kingdom sort of play, though an honest job of writing.

A bit too honest in certain respects and some scenes. An ugly wallowing sort of drama that not only strengthens your disgust with specific examples of the so-called human race, but also gives you a certain feeling of verminous contact with it.

The Hull Show

Shining through the ugliness and grime of the drama, however, is a fine exhibition of character portraiture by Henry Hull. Much the best exhibit of his art, it seems to me, the actor has given in a considerable spell.

He plays Jeeter Lester, farmer. A hard chewing, spitting, cursing son of the soil who sleeps in his clothes as long as they will stand the strain and approaches the responsibilities of husbandry and domestic service with the intelligence and enthusiasm of a Belgian hare.

Jeeter, his family in rags, his children scattered to the four corners of the State, his farm a waste because he has no credit with which to buy seed to plant, gives you a

glimpse of the Lester living routines through the better part of two days.

Family Group

He quarrels with his beaten, starved, shiftless wife, whose consuming ambition it is, aside from the recurring hope of food, to get hold of a stylish dress to die in.

He prays with Sister Bessie, a self-appointed agent of the Lord, who lusts after the younger men and buys a Lester son with an automobile and a promise of a job as preacher as well as husband.

He steals a bag of turnips from his son-in-law come to demand his marital rights from a Lester daughter who prefers a bit of straw on the floor to his bed.

He cruelly upbraids a daughter defaced from birth with a split lip that discourages suitors but fails to depress her hope of eventual possession.

And finally, when the son runs over his mother with the amorous psalm sister's automobile and leaves her dying in the front yard, Jeeter goes to sleep on the porch while waiting for others to dig his wife's grave in the field.

Another case of art's labor lost, this "Tobacco Road." I fear. It isn't the sort of entertainment folks buy in the theatre. Nor ever have bought within my memory.

There is no emotional satisfaction to be had from sheer ugliness, however artfully displayed or expressed.

Therefore, though Mr. Hull's performance is a perfect study, amazingly detailed, tellingly pictured, believable even in its exaggerations, there is no more than the appeal of a cold art in it. And there are few art connoisseurs among paying playgoers.

Splendid performances, too, by Dean Jagger as the repulsed son-in-law; by Sam Byrd as the youthful bridegroom; by Maude Odell as the praying housewife; by Ruth Hunter as the unhappy split-lip; by Margaret Wycherly as the hopeless mother and by Renelce Rehan as the man-hating daughter. A real dirt road by Robert Redington Sharpe and direction by Anthony Brown, the producer.

"Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 5, 1933

Americana

By PERCY HAMMOND

IN A play sometimes terrifying, sometimes humorous, the authors of "Tobacco Road" escort us to the Georgia back-country, there to put us into intimate contact with the poor whites of that God-forsaken region. The expedition is thorough and well conducted, and I venture to say that it will be stimulating to experienced patrons of the Irish and Russian hut-drama. Also to those who get a naughty thrill from stark disclosures of the primitive human animal while writhing in the throes of gender. It may not be recommended to the squeamish, if any, since it is relentlessly rutish and unclean. But to me, whose knowledge of such things has been gained from a casual reading of the more brutal fiction of the South, it is a vividly authentic, minor and squalid tragedy, lighted in the right spots with glowing and honest humor.

The scene is a forlorn Georgia farmstead, a tumble-down shack inhabited by Jeeter

Lester, his slattern wife and their brood. Jeeter (Mr. Henry Hull) is afflicted with all the ailments of his type, from indolence to sleeping sickness, but he has a Micawber sense of humorous hope. They have no money, and the only food they get is when Jeeter forages the cupboards of his neigh-

bors. One of his wife's daughters by another man is wedded, at the age of twelve, to a husband who revolts her. His youngest son is taken in marriage by an amorous female evangelist, an ex-prostitute from Augusta. All of this meets with his approval, but he is tragically disturbed when the bankers come along and threaten to evict him from the land that has belonged to the lazy Lesters since God knows when.

All of this, of course, is but a sparse approximation of the contents of "Tobacco Road." Its slight suggestions of incest and other eccentric emotions must, in the interest of newspaper delicacy, be hidden from print. It cannot be told here how the hare-lipped Ellie May goes into indecent, Egyptian convulsions, nor how Loy Benney bares his passion for Pearl Lester's golden locks. It should be enough to hint that the love-life and economics of the characters of "Tobacco Road" are suitable subjects for study by those who are able to take it. In case I may be permitted a moment of enthusiasm, I shall use it in praising the characterization by Henry Hull of the moth-eaten old jungle Georgian, Jeeter Lester. If, in my many adventures into the Theater, I have ever seen a completer impersonation, I have forgotten it. He is that difficult character from tip to toe never for an instant deviating from its honest delineation. I remove my brown derby to Mr. Hull for his achievement; as I do to Mr. Sam Byrd for his uncompromised acting in the insolent brat of Mr. Caldwell's misanthropic back-lands.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 5, 1933

Anthony Brown Presents Henry Hull at the Masque in Mr. Caldwell's "Tobacco Road"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THOUGH I have not read Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road" and think but little of the play which John Kirkland has made from it, I must confess there are several vital and earthy moments in the production which Anthony Brown has given it at the Masque that bear the unmistakable marks of Mr. Caldwell's writing as it revealed itself in such a novel as "God's Little Acre."

What I am getting at is that Mr. Kirkland's dramatization seems, on the face of it, to belong much more to Mr. Caldwell than it does to Mr. Kirkland, and for that very reason it falls as a play. It is another book-bound script, which is interesting enough in all those brutally atmospheric moments at which Mr. Caldwell excels as a novelist but which proves ridiculously inept whenever it attempts to twist its slight plot into dramatic form.

It succeeds most when it sounds as if some one who was reading Mr. Caldwell's pages aloud to you had somehow managed to fill your eyes as well as your ears with pictures of the drab animals, known as human beings, who inhabit the back country of Mr. Caldwell's Georgia. But the theatre is a cruelly tricky place, and the same unrelieved brutality which can lend conviction to the chapters of a novel can prove absurdly overdrawn and laughable when acted out upon a stage.

Insane Sex Living

It is this very thing which seems to have happened at the Masque to the lustful morons

of "Tobacco Road." Denied the protection of print, seen in the flesh rather than described in words, and spied upon by an audience rather than encountered alone, these men and women become incredible caricatures of themselves. Almost every third speech they utter tends to undo whatever may have been done by the two speeches they have just spoken. For what might pass in the library as an author's sincere notion of the primitiveness of the "poor whites" soon begins to sound in the theatre like a long-drawn parody of all the grim tales of the soil that have come out of the South.

Mr. Caldwell's story, as retold by Mr. Kirkland, is a resolutely squalid yarn which describes the unhappy home life of the "sinful Lesters." They are a weird lot of savages,

these Lesters: filthy, starved, light-fingered and lecherous. They are pigs who wallow in the dirt of the miserable sty they are willing to call home. They have the look of pigs, the smell of pigs, the habits of pigs, and the morals of guinea pigs. They are so close to the soil that it is hard to tell them from it.

Old Pa Lester loves the little strip of land upon which he and his forefathers have eked out an existence. He loves it so much that he tries to save it from the banks, which have taken it over, by means of all inhuman bargains that, for three loose-jointed and feeble acts, provide "Tobacco Road" with whatever plot it can boast.

He is a profane old codger who delights in recalling his promiscuous past; who thinks nothing of taunting one of his daughters about the split upper lip which disfigures her; who encourages his worthless son to marry an elderly lady preacher for the automobile she promises to buy him; who leaves his mute old mother-in-law unburied in the nearby fields, and who ignores the wishes of his wife even in her hour of death and is willing to sell her illegitimate daughter back to the young husband from whom she has run away.

More Than Three Little Pigs

Though there are times when the loamy mortals in "Tobacco Road" have an authentic and an unconventional interest that cannot be denied, the play in which they find themselves is, on the whole, as feeble as it is unpleasant. It has been carefully produced at the Masque, includes a single setting by Mr. Sharpe which finds the stage floor heaped in dirt, and is well enough acted by Sam Byrd, Ruth Hunter, Dean Jagger and Renée Rehan.

Maude Odell is very hard to put up with in the entirely phony part of the lustful lady preacher. Margaret Wycherly is appropriately fagged and weary as the ill-used mother. And Henry Hull—sporting a fierce crop of red hair, a grizzly beard, a stained shirt, overalls and a great pair of dusty shoes—not only has a very good time of it as old Pa Lester but gives one of the best performances of his career. But he cannot save the play from itself or from the deadening weight of the live stock it chooses to parade as men and women.